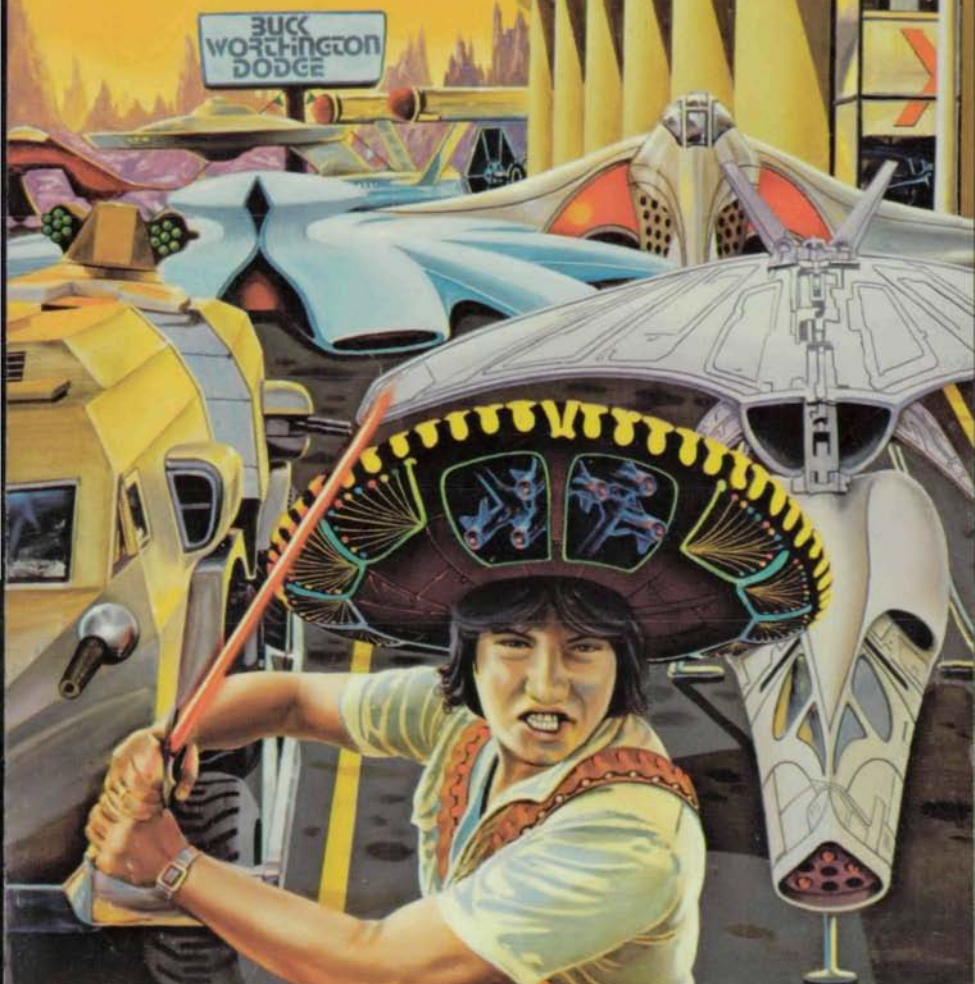


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AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

"This is the best issue we
ever published!" — A.B.



**Robert Silverberg's "Opinion" (formerly
in Galileo) • "The Fall," Lisa Tuttle &
George R.R. Martin • "The Vampire of
Mallworld," Somtow Sucharitkul •
"Hall of Fame," Gregory Benford**

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in this issue

BUILDING AN ISSUE of *Amazing* is something like arranging a spread for a grab bag of guests — maybe from different planets, each expecting proper hosting and entertainment. So you serve up some familiar, some adventuresome, and a few touches of total ZONK (taking a chance here, stretching an appetite there). If you do it right, each will find his own piece de resistance.

To whet your appetite, Bob Silverberg opens this issue with his "Opinion" column (from the late, great *Galileo* magazine) which will now be a regular feature in *Amazing*.

Lighter fare on our festive board this issue includes the wickedly funny "Vampire of Mallworld" by Somtow Sucharitkul whose pie-in-the-sky world erupts with the grislies — rare and delicious; Richard Anker's "Action Hook" — a zonker tidbit; Jessica Salmonson's "Lock-Box" fantasy with interesting role reversals; and Marvin Kaye's neat little Ozian ditty, "A Smell of Sulphur" (soon to appear in a Doubleday collection, *The Possession of Immanuel Wolf and other Improbable Tales*).

Hearty offerings include a poignant excerpt from Lisa Tuttle and George R.R. Martin's forthcoming novel, *Windhaven*; a bizzare containment for violence in Gregory Benford's Hall of Fame story, "Nobody Lives on Burton Street"; a different dish

from the prolific Wayne Wightman — "The Greater Gift," inspired by a little known Shakespeare play, *Timon of Athens*; an adventuresome search for a better bug in Lewis Jacobson's super science fiction gem, "Project Purple"; and more.

Delectable sides and tidbits include Hank Stine's biting "Encounter"; Philip Sidney Jennings' incredible zonking yarn, "So I Was Born"; selections of poetry from David R. Bunch, Steven E. McDonald and Scott Green; plus a nourishing group of articles and department features.

Dessert is from a group of talented illustrators — Alicia Austin, Steve Fabian, Gary Freeman, Sabrina Jarema and Kent Bash.

Noted California artist Kent Bash has created for the cover of *Amazing* one of his special visions — clearly a comment on our hang-up with hardware. Working in his Sherman Oaks studio, Bash translates his wry observances on life and technology into paintings that grace a growing number of collections, including those of many celebrities. Recently his work has appeared on the cover of *F&SF* and on the cover and interior of the special trade edition of Harlan Ellison's novella, "*All The Lies That Are My Life*" (Underwood-Miller, San Francisco, \$12.00).

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AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES



MAY, 1981

FOUNDED IN 1926 BY HUGO GERNSBACK

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by Kent Bash

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opinion

Robert Silverberg

NOT LONG AGO, while visiting a medium-sized western city, I paused in front of one of the largest bookstores in town to examine an impressive window display of science fiction books, complete with some toy robots and other glittery decorations. Or perhaps I should have said "science fiction" books, because what was actually visible in that handsome window display were such titles as —

H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*. The photo-book of *Alien*. Chris Foss' *21st Century Foss*. *The Flight of Dragons*, by Peter Dickinson. *Alien Landscapes*, edited by Robert Holdstock and Malcolm Edwards. Plus several *Battlestar Galactica* books, an array of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* items, some collected comic strips from *Heavy Metal*, and assorted material on gnomes, fairies, monsters, and vampires. Beneath all this gaudy and flamboyant stuff, scattered offhandedly at the very bottom of the display, were a few volumes of what we term prose fiction — a novel of Anne McCaffrey's, a recent Arthur C. Clarke book, one of mine (maybe they knew I was in town for the weekend) and two of the currently fashionable bulky pseudo-Tolkien adventure novels.

Science? Not much. Fiction? Well, at second or third remove, I guess. A beautiful book containing reproductions of science fiction magazine and bookjacket illustrations does have some peripheral link to the stories being illustrated; and a book of comic-book-style adaptations of Roger Zelazny stories, which was also in the window, is after all based on the Zelazny stories on which it's based, right? But yet — but yet

The whole display chilled me. Here were all these large and lovely volumes, at \$8.95 and \$9.95 and \$17.95 and such, lavishly produced and widely publicized, displayed as "science fiction" — but they were nearly all picture-books, and most of those that required actual reading were on the simplest sort, proffering elementary soft-headed

fantasies of the kind we used to dote on in the fourth grade. Sure, Clarke's austere speculations on the future of technology and my own somber novel of college students searching for immortality were in the window too, but tucked away down where they'd be noticed only by a visiting author uneasily hunting for his own works.

Is this the new illiteracy of which we were warned since television became the national kiddie pastime a quarter of a century ago? Is science fiction — real written-down science fiction, using words arranged in grammatical structures — doomed now to become an insignificant adjunct to picture-books drawn from fifth-rate Buck Rogers movies and compilations of goblins and beasts? The science fiction on which I was raised in my pre-adolescent and adolescent days, that of Heinlein and Asimov and Kuttner and van Vogt and company, never really taxed the intellect a great deal, at least not in comparison with the books of Messrs. Joyce, Faulkner, Proust, and Mann that some of my more earthbound high school friends were reading, but it did require the ability to comprehend simple declarative sentences. I suspect that that ability still is fairly widespread in American culture, but that science fiction, like so much else, is falling victim to line-of-least-resistance living in these days of visual culture. Just as it was considerably easier, and probably more fun, to read *Caves of Steel* or *The Puppet Masters* than to wrestle with the intricacies of *Ulysses*, so nowadays it must be more appealing to flip through some elegantly lithographed picture-book than to furrow the brow over the actual words of John Varley or Ursula K. LeGuin. It's an uncomfortable concept for someone whose life has been devoted to manipulating verbal symbols on paper, let me tell you. In that same bookstore, glancing nervously through one of my own novels, I found myself wondering if I had pitched the level of reading comprehension too high, if I had perhaps been too demanding in my use of

language. When you start making silent apologies to an imagined audience for having used semi-colons, you're in trouble.

It all worries me, and ought to worry you — you who must still be literate, since *Amazing* has only occasional pictures between all those words. People still can read, but it's a declining skill, and the seduction of those marvelously produced lithographed picture-books has probably been felt even by you. I ask you only to remember, as you leaf through *Heavy Metal* or the latest book of elves and leprechauns or one of the myriad new *Star Trek* spinoffs, that in the beginning was the word — that Homer didn't draw pictures in the sand for his listeners — that even at Lascaux they probably used words to tell stories — and that all this new-fangled stuff emerges quasi-parasitically from what is in fact a verbal literature. The craftsmanship of such people as Giger and Chris Foss is superb, the *Heavy Metal* artists often attain splendid levels of surreal inventiveness, and the special-effects people can make even the dumbest sci-fi flick seem miraculous. But what that bookstore was passing off as science-fiction was actually secondary work, derivative work, generating its energy and power by drawing images from the minds of Fritz Leiber and Roger Zelazny and Theodore Sturgeon and Ray Bradbury and Harlan Ellison and J.R.R. Tolkien and

Anne McCaffrey and Larry Niven and Brian Aldiss and A.E. van Vogt and a lot of other people whose vision was expressed in words, assembled in sentences and published in books. To relegate their work to an insignificant corner, to bury it in a flood of pretty but mindless coffee-table decorations, is to do a disservice not only to the people who write books, but, ultimately, to those who love to read them.

Robert Silverberg

Bob Silverberg, besides being one of science fiction's most noted writers, says to tell you he is . . . "not as famous as Isaac Asimov, but more slender, and not as funny as Harlan Ellison, but taller." A testimony to his mastery of words and imagination is his superb picaresque novel, *Lord Valentine's Castle*, available from Harper & Row, New York. — Ed

The Interstellar Connection

Book Reviews

Tom Staicar

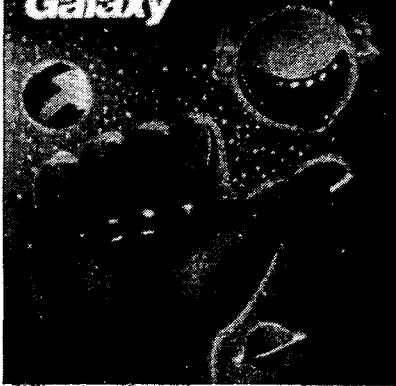
The Hitchhiker's Guide To the Galaxy
by Douglas Adams. Harmony Books/
Crown Publishers. \$6.95.

"Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the Western Spiral

arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun. Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-eight million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea."

So begins *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a comic novel about a Londoner named Arthur Dent who survives the last moments of Earth's existence and then is taken on a wild tour of the Galaxy. An edict has gone out that the Earth must be demolished as it lies directly in the path of the building of a new hyperspatial express route. A visitor from another solar system, who chose the name "Ford Prefect" in order to blend in with Earth people, has arrived in order to do research for the revised edition of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, an encyclopedia of all the useful and important knowledge in the known universe. As the world ends, Prefect takes

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy



Dent with him in his attempt to get safely past an assortment of menacing and odd-ball aliens.

Arthur Dent decides that "his whole life was some kind of a dream and he sometimes wondered whose it was and whether they were enjoying it." When the two of them are captured by the dreaded Vogons, Dent wishes he had a daughter so he could forbid her to marry one. At another point, they find that the interior of a spaceship is exactly like a certain seashore in England, except for the fact that on the ship, the sea is rock still and the buildings wash up and down every few seconds.

If you enjoy the type of zany, black humor and far-out plots provided by Kurt Vonnegut in his best novels, with liberal doses of *Monty Python* humor added, this book will please you. Not every gag works and some of the jokes are rather silly, but the overall effect of the book is that of a non-stop whirlwind tour of Disney World, the Land of Oz, and a black hole in space.

Douglas Adams is a young novelist who attended Cambridge University and has written for a number of television shows including *Monty Python*. Prior to that he claims to have been a bodyguard, a barn builder, and a chicken shed cleaner. He sprinkles his writing with aphorisms such as: "Time is an illusion. Lunchtime doubly so."

The meaning behind this novel might best be summed up by the following quotation from Arthur Dent:

"You know," said Arthur, "it's at times

like this, when I'm trapped in a Vagon airlock with a man from Betelgeuse, and about to die of asphyxiation in deep space, that I really wish I'd listened to what my mother told me when I was young."

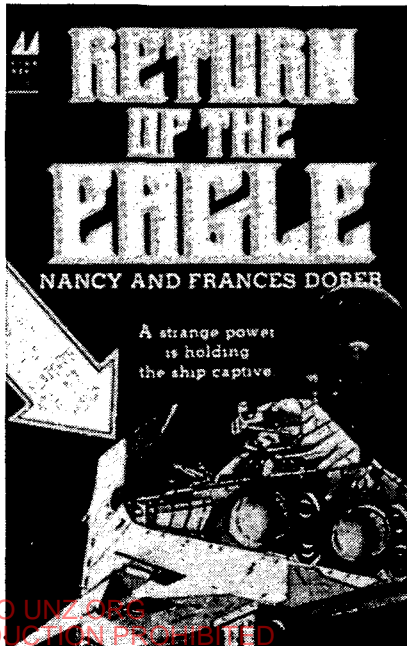
"Why, what did she tell you?"

"I don't know, I didn't listen."

By Daybreak the Eagle by Nancy and Frances Dorer. Manor Books, \$1.95.

Manor Books is trying to develop its line of SF books by working with new authors, supplementing its backlist of established names. In doing this Manor has to take on the biggest publishers in the field, competing for rack space in the stores. Manor has improved greatly from its earliest efforts, and now is a place to watch for emerging talents like Nancy and Frances Dorer.

The Dorers have a fresh writing style and a vitality which makes their novels enjoyable to read. The dialogue moves the story along well and the pace is usually steady and swiftly moving. *By Daybreak the Eagle* has to do with aliens who commandeer an Earth ship, the *Eagle*, taking control of its crew for evil purposes. This is not a brand-new idea, but the story is handled well enough to add new elements to it. *Return of the Eagle* provides more of the same, as does an earlier and unrelated novel *Where No Man Has Trod*. The Dorers are examples of what could be missed if one relies only upon the major com-

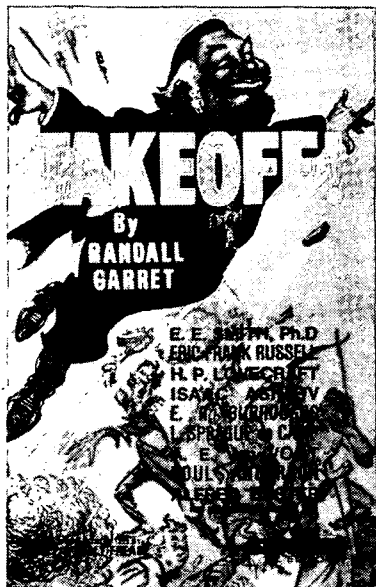


panies for reading matter.

If your local store lacks Manor Books' offerings, write to Manor Book Mailing Service, P.O. Box 690, Rockville Center, NY 11571 and ask for their catalog.

Takeoff! by Randall Garrett. Donning/Starblaze Editions, \$4.95. (5041 Admiral Wright Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23462).

Garrett sold his first story at age fourteen to John W. Campbell, is a personal friend



of about two hundred SF writers, collaborated with Robert Silverberg under the pseudonym "Robert Randall," and was formerly a Catholic priest. Otherwise, he is a quite common type of writer.

Takeoff! is a delightful collection which people who know Randall Garrett have awaited for years. His famous literary pastiches, parodies, and songs are collected here, along with limericks and a series of reviews-in-verse.

Satirizing Hugo Gernsback's *Ralph 124C41+* is a tale in which modern New Yorkers trade common knowledge with each other about a marvelous subway ride, the miracle of electric lighting, and the wonder of skyscrapers. *Slan*, *Foundation*, and other classics are given the treatment by Garrett as he exaggerates their

characteristics. As he says in the introduction: "The idea is to make those idiosyncracies blatantly visible." *Takeoff!* does so in a highly amusing manner.

Robert A. Heinlein's The Green Hills of Earth and Gentlemen, Be Seated, Read by Leonard Nimoy. A cassette recording, Caedmon #CP1526.

Caedmon offers a series of cassettes and records which feature people like Leonard Nimoy (and often the authors themselves) reading from the classic works of science fiction² and fantasy. Nimoy's handling of Heinlein is superb, his voice well-suited to the task of bringing the stories to life. The tough, matter-of-fact attitude of the Heinlein spacemen comes through in Nimoy's version, in this expertly done reading of the stories.

Send for a catalog at this address: Caedmon, 1995 Broadway, New York, NY 10023. Tolkien, Bradbury, McCaffrey, Clarke, Simak, and Herbert are among the writers whose works are presented in recorded form.

Science Fiction Writer's Workshop — I by Barry B. Longyear. Owlswick Press, \$5.95. (Box 8243, Philadelphia, PA 19101).

Longyear is the recipient of the Hugo and Nebula Awards, among others, after his "seasoned career" of around four years of writing. He feels he is close enough to his first professional sale ("The Tryouts" in November, 1978) to function as a guide to the neophyte writer who is trying to get through that very difficult phase of the writing life.

Science Fiction Writer's Workshop — I deals with the mechanics of fiction, beginning at the level of the bare essentials. No experience is presumed, and Longyear guides the reader through exercises and examples from his own published and unpublished fiction, laying the groundwork for writing science fiction.

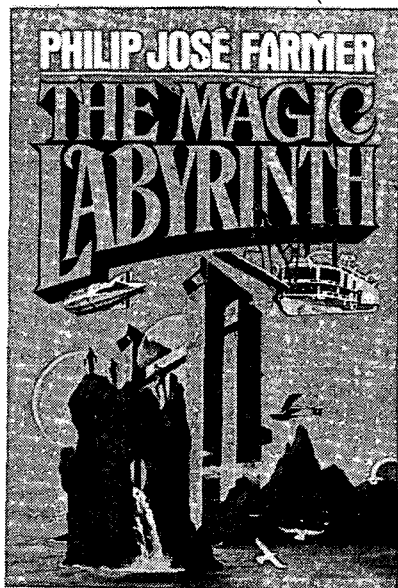
No nonsense is permitted and the writer is expected to actually try out the advice as he or she goes along, rather than breeze through the book waiting for magic to happen. Longyear's record of rapid advancement and accomplishments in the genre are well-known. Anyone interested in writing for a living should profit from this serious and carefully produced manual. Talent and a willingness to work hard are not included

in the purchase priced.

Philip Jose Farmer's Riverworld series:

To Your Scattered Bodies Go (Gregg Press, \$12.95; Berkley paperback \$2.25); **The Fabulous Riverboat** (Gregg Press, \$13.50; Berkley paperback \$2.25); **The Dark Design** (Berkley paperback \$2.25); **The Magic Labyrinth** (Berkley Putnam hardcover \$11.95).

All four also available in SF Book Club editions. In 1952, Philip Jose Farmer conceived of the idea of a Riverworld, a planet



dominated by an enormous river on whose banks billions of dead Earth people were mysteriously resurrected. A publisher cheated Farmer out of his advance and held up publication of the original novel, dealing the young writer a setback to his career. Years later, the first two volumes of the revised and expanded Riverworld series were published in hardcover by Berkley Putnam. Readers were brought to the cliffhanging conclusion of *The Fabulous Riverboat* with a profusion of unanswered questions. The promised final volume which would answer those questions did not appear until long after the 1971 publication of the earlier books.

The Dark Design (1977) turned out to be only part of a larger manuscript which would have its resolution in *The Magic*

Labyrinth. In 1980 the final book appeared, drawing attention from mainstream critics in *Time Magazine* as well as thousands of Farmer fans who have recently pushed the book to the top of the SF bestseller lists.

If you have not yet read any of the Riverworld series, I urge you to read all four volumes, as well as the "side-stream" novella in the Berkley paperback *Riverworld and Other Stories* (2.25). These books take their place beside the acknowledged classics of our field. Few can equal their depth of characterization and diversity of subplots.

The Magic Labyrinth, unfortunately does not provide facile answers to all the many questions posed earlier in the series. We find the answer to the nature of the Ethicals, the secrets of the Tower in the Mists, and so on, but some questions remain shrouded in mystery. I think that Farmer's intention was to entertain us with the adventure stories, get us thinking about the nature of life and death, and provide some guidance toward the possible nature of God and the potential problems and opportunities of an afterlife. Thus, as it would be impossible in real life to answer each and every question in religion and philosophy, it should be this way in fiction if it is to be believable and mature. Farmer was in a unique position to make any religion "come true" in the final volume of the series, or to turn the series into a vehicle for atheism or agnosticism. What he did with his conclusion was in keeping with the vision he had for Riverworld.

The mere fact that Mark Twain, Sir Richard Burton, and the rest were so well drawn, while the suspense and mystery elements of the novels were so well blended with the philosophical enquiries, resulted in a rewarding reading experience. Farmer attempted much more than most writers and he achieved much more. The Riverworld books are an example of how science fiction can do things that general fiction cannot.

Tom Staicar, 34, lives with his wife Joy in Ann Arbor, MI, where he is Supervisor in the Interlibrary Loan Office and selector of SF acquisitions for the University of Michigan Graduate Library.

An avid reader of SF since the age of 10, Staicar has written about it for such magazines as the *Writer's Digest*, *Today's Student*, and *Science Fiction Review*.

intercom

Intercom seeks letters discussing ideas expressed in articles or fiction on our pages: or something that may be of general interest to our readers.

Dear Editor,

What a pleasant surprise! Picked up *Amazing* Jan. '81 after a long hiatus in my readership due to the departure of Ted White. Thanks to your review column I have rejoined the fold of *Amazing* readers. I've been checking out your review column for quite a while, mainly in the bookstore aisle. I decided to give the Norman Spinrad review a more detailed reading as I've been desirous of becoming acquainted with his work. Also I wished to read the fantasy book review. As usual I found Staicar's column enjoyable, informative, and helpful in deciding which books to read and/or purchase. The only problem with the column is length; much too short. Since *Amazing* and *Fantastic* have been combined the reviews should at least be doubled. Also more fantasy reviews as a lot of my reading is of that nature.

As I was saying, thanks to "The Interstellar Connection" my opinion of your magazine has changed drastically. When Ted White left you seemed to be after the *Star Wars* crowd. Not now. The best story was Ellison's, of course, and his afterward. Silverberg's oldie was a real "Hohum"er, though I liked Fabian's artwork. "The Lang Concurrence" was straight out of Alfred béster's "Disappearing Act." "Buckeye and Spitball" really captured me, and kept me guessing. I figured it for straight horror (child fantasy leads to horrible crime) until the ending; good emotional rush, "horror story type" from that one! As for "Credit Where Credit Is Due," too clever-cutesy for me. Ryan's story ("Give Us This Day Our Daily Death") — good but not my style. "The Pod," a throwaway. Robbins' story ("Trailing the Great White Snail") was more enjoyable if taken as complete fantasy. Invertebrate science kept threatening to wreck the story, but I successfully resisted. Coins' story ("Pearl Harbor Parallax") was good on a non-plot level; i.e. his use of math imagery and such. The Lem interview needed more background info for us

novitiates. Last, and a great last for my reintroduction issue, "Love Among the Flowers" was an excellent extrapolation-warning of the kind that helped break the social mold of the American culture many moons ago.

In conclusion, a great surprise, and how about a letter column and many more reviews.

Steve Stokes
Sarasota, FL

Dear Ms. Mavor:

I believe that the magazine has shown great improvement in the last year. The Ted White magazine(s) had fallen into what I would call a "gloom and doom" rut. The first issues after he left (with the reprints) were pretty bad. The first issues that used new stories tended to be too much "gosh, wow, gee whiz!", but recent issues have shown a steady increase in quality. The November issue I would rate good to excellent, with four stories I like a lot and only one I don't care for. If you are interested, I like the Malzberg (and I usually don't), "And Parity for All" (slight but well done); "The Strange Rider of the Good Year" (Bunch is a special taste, and I have it — this is what I mean by 'take a chance'); and "The Journey Witch." I did not care for "Fear Therapy and Incontinence."

You are having some trouble gaining acceptance with fans, probably due to the reprint and early issues, and a kind of feeling of loyalty to Ted White. I have written and/or spoken to several popular fanzine editors, urging them and their readers to judge your magazine as it is now. I believe that if you can hang on and continue to improve, you will be able to win a viable share of the market for short fiction.

I would suggest that you aim for a mix of about 60% science fiction and 40% fantasy. There are almost no outlets for fantasy stories and a regular market (even a low paying market) will eventually attract some top writers. I believe it would pay off — eventually — for you to be more adventuresome in your story selection; take some chances.

David L. Travis
Glassboro, NJ

Dear Elinor,

I am not in the business of hurting feelings or upsetting precious patterns of thought among editors. It pays too little. But your note of 10/21/80 was one of null and void semantic content in so far as my purposes are concerned. I can only assume (charitably) that it in some way fulfills your purposes as you see them. It didn't do blue fritters for me. If you would concentrate on letting a person in on why a ms was rejected and not be so dad-blamed concerned about politeness, an unpublished reject like me might have a chance to make you money.

I can write good. I can. But if paying attention to your needs is a condition for employment, why not be reasonable and at least let me know what your nova-hot needs are!

Tarnation, you tell why you choose a particular story. Which is nice and we all think you are so polite and reasonable in allowing us, the general readership, in on how the "editorial mind" decides a story is worth publishing, but I for one would be better aided by a skeleton outline of why a story was rejected.

Reading your note, my most charitable assumption would be that you felt my story very good, but not suitable for some unknown reason for your magazine. My least charitable assumption would be that you felt the story simply jack-ass stupid and the writer to boot and that by a quick-brush tactic you might be forever rid of a nuisance. I tend to think the real answer lies in the great awful middle ground. But who's to know?

We in government programming shops are fond of telling each other to "get with the program" when we feel like being polite. And frankly, writing is important enough to me that I will for sure do my best to get with the program if you'll tell me where the general area of the procedure division begins. It would be appreciated.

I have learned that scratching one-another's backs can lead in time to a reasonable simulation of "fairness" among humans. I just might buy your magazine if you will guarantee that I can find something of value to me in getting into print. As a general rule I do not buy magazines. I prefer

to buy collected books of short stories so that I can read a whole bunch in one sitting and not be bothered by the clutter of advertisements and editorial commentary. Besides, a paperback book contains more stories for less money than several monthly magazines put together. It's sheer economics. And also I hate serialization. More than once in my life I have never finished a story because I did not get the next issue. Most frustrating.

I am willing to reform my habits sparingly at least if you can give reason why it would be of benefit. S'okay? S'all right.

PS. I really can write well. Just give me an idea what you think would fit your needs. I probably have something already written.

Paying attention to editorial needs, especially by reading the magazine you hope will publish your work, is certainly an acknowledged prerequisite for any kind of success in this business. It is definitely up to the writer to do his homework, whatever market he chooses. Editors do send guidelines if requested, as an additional aid. As for any publication having the desire or time to coax work from an unknown writer by guaranteeing its own worthiness to said writer — you really are in fantasyland. If writing is really important to you, you will give up this delusion post haste. Rejection slips with polite notes are sent with stories that do not meet our needs. Stories that are closer to the mark may get more comment. There is no time or money for sending every writer an outline detailing reasons for rejection: we are not a writing school. Ideally, both writer and editor appreciate and respect each other's time, and will deal with one another in a courteous and professional manner.

Dear Elinor;

As to what I thought of the contents of your November issue: objectively — distinctly varied types of stories with something to appeal to nearly any kind of SF fan mentality, and even to make new SF fans; subjectively — liked "Fear Therapy and Incontinence" very much, thought "A Stitch in Time" was good, and liked "Amorphobe." Most important to me, your magazine continues to reveal that in-

tangible, yet substantial, conscience with which I identify.

I often find personal interviews about as captivating as a picnic on green asphalt, but the *Amazing* interview with Harlan Ellison was excellent.

I am sure the words of Paul Collins will inspire some readers to pick up pen and paper, but as for depressions, there are states of mind, and states of the state. As to how SF literature is allowed to deal with

either, that is the domain of each editor and publisher. I am currently learning my lessons on that score.

It is my wish that you field 200 pages an issue, twelve issues a year, by early '81. I notice the changes going on in SF publishing, and I hope you come out on top — you deserve it.

Duane DeWitt
Milwaukee, WI

To the Unknown God

I feel the glass-eyed snake of time coiled about my waist to sink its fangs of onyx into my flesh to crush me with its coils of steel

I hear the chimes of the musical boxes playing clashing tunes through time and space smashing me with their webs of spidery steel sound

The musical box is timing meeeee

the musicalboxisrunningdown

the musical box is myself, alone . . .

I feel lifesbreath fading away leaving my mind exposed i am unprotected by flesh and blood now no longer the i that i was
i am dead

i am alive

i am really me

i am all that i am

all that i can be

now

I see spinning planets a hydrogen speck in the void of time a dust mote in the air a blazing sun I see all all is me

I am variation upon a theme counterpoint and melody thunderflash and the lightning.strike love hate and stability

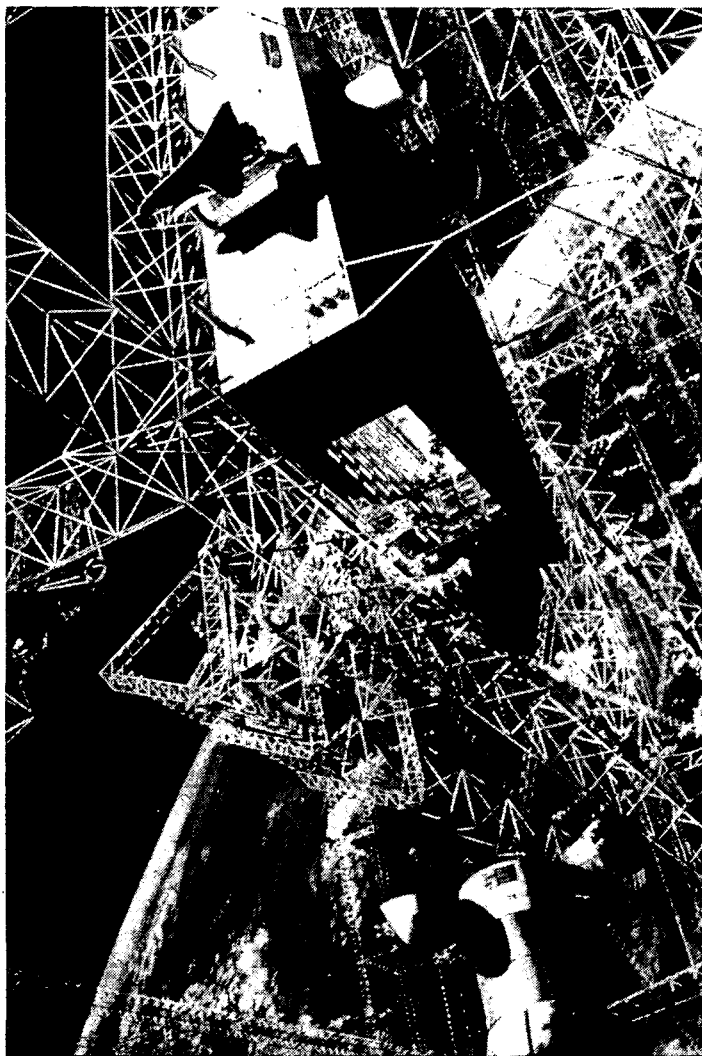
iamyou

iamme

iamall

I know what thoughts run in your minds I feel blood course through your veins I am actors in the masterpiece I am music and white noise I am the musical box the musical box is timing you the musical box is singing to you

— Steven Edward McDonald



Construction of a solar power station

**Our answer for the future
lies in the energy that
powers the stars. . .**

Futures Fantastic

A Science Series Feature

TOWARD UNLIMITED ENERGY

ON JULY 16, 1969, in less than 10 minutes, the Saturn V moon rocket consumed approximately one percent of the *annual energy budget* allotted to the entire Roman Empire during its most energetic phase. Another way of putting it is the Apollo launching expended energy at a rate 5000 times faster than that of the Roman Empire in the height of its activity with its large scale deployment of armies and massive public works projects. The space program, and transportation in general, being only one of our many energy consuming activities partially accounts for the fact that on a per capita basis, the United States consumes energy 10,000 times faster than the Roman Empire.

Indeed, the more sophisticated a technological society, the more energy it will consume. Granted that a good portion of this energy is wasted, still the bulk of it

goes into providing multimode transportation and communication systems, housing, recreation, basic research and development, and a host of other goods and activities that shape our environment to our liking. In short, this energy is being utilized to give us the machinery and the freedom to be what we want to be and do what we want to do.

To say that energy conservation is the only real solution to the current energy crises, is patently absurd. It will only ease the crisis temporarily, and is therefore good practice. However, technology is constantly exposing us to new opportunities which consume ever increasing amounts of energy. We will not shun these opportunities simply for the sake of conservation. We will not turn our backs on space because of a reluctance to expend the required energy. Nor will we turn down the opportunities of better and

J. Ray Dettling

faster transportation, medicine, housing or anything else for the sole purpose of saving energy. We will expend the necessary energy for these things because we want them. They make us a bigger part of the universe, and it is part of our basic nature to enhance our position in the universal scheme of things. If this was not the case, we would have become extinct long ago. It is our ability to understand and exploit the laws of nature to their fullest that has allowed us to survive as a species throughout the ages. And so it must be in the ages to come. Thus, new sources of energy must be found and exploited, and this again will require new technology.

Many energy avenues beyond fossil fuels have been identified such as shale oil, synthetic fuels, geothermal, nuclear, wind, bioconversion, ocean currents, passive and active solar, etc. They all have their positive attributes and their drawbacks. Some offer relief for the short term but have limited supply. Others offer long term relief but have serious environmental effects. Still others are simply too costly to pursue. As we delve deeper into the energy problem, more and more scientists are coming to the conclusion that the real solution lies in either controlled thermonuclear fusion (CTR) or space based solar power.

Thermonuclear fusion is the highly energetic process that powers the stars and our sun. It is also the power behind the hydrogen bomb. It should not be surprising that both solutions to the energy problem stem from the same basic process.

A thermonuclear fusion reaction is similar to many chemical reactions in that it requires some energy to start it, but once the reaction starts, it releases more energy than it consumes. The striking of a match is a good example. It takes heat energy to start the reaction, as by rubbing the match on a rough surface, but once initiated, much more energy is released. The match in turn can be used to trigger yet a larger reaction such as paper in a fire place. In this case, the energy output of the match is sufficient to heat the paper to the required temperature to allow it to chemically break down and combine with free oxygen from the air, again releasing more energy than it consumes. This process is a simple chemical chain reaction.

A nuclear reaction is quite similar

except for one important difference. All chemical reactions are electrical in nature, that is, they result in a change in the stored electrical energy of a substance and therefore derive this energy from the electromagnetic force — one of nature's three fundamental forces. When hydrogen and oxygen combine to form water, the electrons in the hydrogen and oxygen atoms actually give up some of their stored energy and move to lower energy positions. The previously stored energy is given off as heat and light, which are forms of electromagnetic radiation. It is exactly this reaction that pushed the Apollo spacecraft to the moon.

Nuclear fusion, on the other hand, derives its energy from the nucleus of the atoms which are held in check by another fundamental force — called, not surprisingly, the nuclear force. This force is many times stronger than the electromagnetic force. As a result, nuclear reactions yield a million times more energy per pound than chemical reactions.

There are two major types of nuclear reactions — fission and fusion. In a fission reaction the nucleus of the fuel element splits into two or more lighter elements, and in the process, some of the fuel gets converted into energy in accordance with Einstein's famous equation, $E = mc^2$. E represents energy, m is the equivalent mass and c is the velocity of light — 10,000,000,000 centimeters per second. The equation indicates that a very small amount of mass can release an enormous quantity of energy. This is the process behind the atomic bomb that was used against Japan in World War II. Since then, methods were developed to control the reaction for peaceful purposes. But this did not pose any serious technical problems because the reaction is very easy to start since we are dealing with heavy, unstable atoms which are just "looking" for an excuse to split into lighter, more stable atoms. The major problem stems from the by-products of the fission reaction which remain highly radioactive for a long time. The question of what to do with these radioactive wastes is still a subject of heated debate. There are also many problems associated with assuring that the reaction can be maintained at a safe level under all circumstances. The recent event at Three Mile Island has raised even greater concerns. Right or

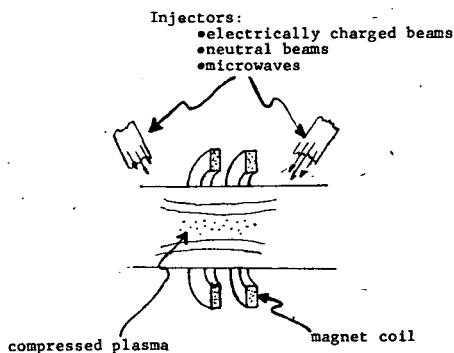
wrong, the nuclear industry will suffer a great deal from TMI. Finally, nuclear fission requires the usage of heavy elements which are in limited supply and are in themselves often highly radioactive, requiring special processing and handling precautions.

Nuclear fusion does not have these problems. If something goes wrong, the reaction simply stops. It is inherently failsafe and there are no radioactive wastes. In a fusion reaction two or more light elements are fused to form heavier elements with some mass lost in the transition. As in the fission reaction, the missing mass is converted to pure energy, with about ten times more output per pound than the fission reaction. Due to the abundance of light elements, the supply of energy is virtually unlimited. Many reactions are possible, but the most common fusion reaction combines deuterium and tritium which are special forms, called isotopes, of hydrogen. For each deuterium/tritium fusion, one atom of helium and a free neutron are produced accompanied by an enormous amount of released energy. This released energy is 160 times the required energy to start the reaction.

Tritium is derived from lithium, a relatively common element. The most abundant source of hydrogen and its isotope, deuterium, is water, thus the oceans provide an excellent source of fuel for a fusion reaction. For example, eight gallons of water contain one gram of deuterium. This small amount (approximately one five hundredth of a pound) has the equivalent energy output of 80 tons of TNT, and the available energy from our total supply of deuterium is more than one billion times the energy content of the world's entire oil reserve. This enormous source of energy could support our world population for nearly six billion years with each individual consuming ten times the current U.S. per capita energy consumption level. In other words, the energy source is virtually inexhaustible.

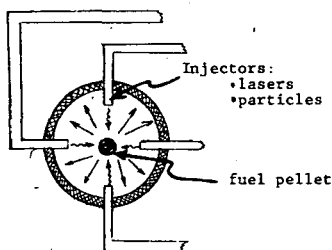
There is one catch. No one has yet been able to construct a machine to unleash this energy in a controlled manner. Three conditions must be met before the reaction can even occur: (1) The fuel must be heated to temperatures in excess of 50 million degrees Kelvin (90 million degrees Fahrenheit). By comparison, this temperature would make the Sun feel like an iceberg. (2) Also, the fuel must be

FIGURE 1. Approaches Toward Controlled Thermonuclear Fusion



MAGNETIC CONFINEMENT SCHEMATIC

A deuterium/tritium plasma is heated to 50 million degrees Kelvin and compressed by a powerful magnetic field to achieve fusion conditions.



INERTIAL CONFINEMENT SCHEMATIC

A tiny hollow pellet containing an inner lining of deuterium/tritium fuel is struck by high energy laser or particle beams resulting in explosive ablation of the outer shell and compression of the inner lining.

TABLE I. U.S. Organizations Engaged in Major Fusion Research

APPROACH	ORGANIZATION	DEVICE
MAGNETIC CONFINEMENT	Princeton's Plasma Physics Lab	TOKOMAK — Toroidal bottle with neutral beam injectors
	Lawrence Livermore Lab	TANDEM MIRROR APPROACH — helical bottle
	General Atomic	DOUBLET — a modified TOKOMAK
	Oakridge National Lab	TOKOMAK system
INERTIAL CONFINEMENT	Lawrence Livermore Lab	SHIVA NOVA — 20 and 40 armed laser systems
	Los Alamos	ANTARES — 6 beam, 100 kilojoule laser system
	Sandia	Multiple electron beam and ion beam system
	KMS	Laser systems

compressed to a high density to guarantee the required number of collisions, and (3) conditions 1 and 2 must be sustained for the required length of time, which is usually less than a second, but varies, depending upon what approach is taken.

It is extremely difficult to meet all these conditions simultaneously, but after 2 decades of intensive efforts, many of the most sophisticated physics laboratories throughout the world are coming close. Two major approaches are being pursued: (1) Magnetic confinement and (2) inertial confinement. The first uses intense magnetic fields to confine the heated plasma (ionized deuterium/tritium fuel). Simultaneously the plasma is heated by electromagnetic radiation as in a microwave oven or by injecting an extremely high electrically charged or neutral beam current across it. The more recent inertial confinement approach arrives at the required conditions by bombarding a fuel pellet with intense particle or laser beams from all directions. When this happens, the pellet's outer layer rapidly heats up and explodes outward. The "kick" or inertial reaction force drives the remaining core inward where it is compressed to 1,000 times the density of lead. During compression, rapid heating occurs and the fusion process takes place.

Both approaches, shown schematically in Figure 1, have been successful in producing a reaction and have therefore demonstrated the concept's feasibility. Table 1 lists the major research laboratories pursuing each approach.

The above techniques may sound like straight forward engineering. Let me assure you, they are not. For the magnetic confinement approach, the fusion fuel must be raised to temperatures far above those occurring in the center of the Sun, yet inches away are superconducting coils operating at near absolute zero (-459°F). Quite remarkable that in the laboratory, scientists have placed the hottest spot on the solar system a mere arms length away from the coldest spot. But this is not the most significant condition; the fusion process itself is a collection of superlatives. Since there is no known material that can survive temperatures in excess of $7,000^{\circ}\text{C}$, the $50,000,000^{\circ}\text{C}$ plasma must be contained by a magnetic bottle, literally a force field which prevents the plasma from contacting the walls of the reactor. No magnets were available that could do the job, so they had to be developed. Today, the biggest and most powerful magnets in the world are dedicated to various fusion experiments. The plasma itself is heated by intense electric currents, electromag-

netic radiation (microwaves), neutral beam currents, or combinations of these. These techniques involve the most sophisticated tools of modern physics adding new complexities to the fusion problem. One of these complexities, that continued to plague fusion researchers, was that of plasma instabilities. At these extremely high temperatures the particles within the plasma are moving at a good fraction of the velocity of light. They begin interacting with the surrounding electrical and magnetic fields in strange and unpredictable ways, counterproductive to the fusion effort. Their behavior and that of the plasma as a whole had to be understood before further progress in fusion could be made. That in itself was a difficult task since the required instruments still had to be invented.

At the height of these problems, the inertial confinement approach surfaced. But, this was no piece of cake either. More powerful lasers had to be developed. Currently a 100 trillion watt power level is required with a pulse width of one billionth of a second. During this short time period, this single laser is delivering more power than that consumed by every nation on Earth. But, this is only the beginning. The deuterium/tritium target, smaller than the head of a pin, had to be illuminated on all sides equally and simultaneously. This meant that multiple lasers had to be used with unprecedented precision in timing. Remember, the whole event only lasts one billionth of a second, and the fusion reaction takes place in less than 100 trillionths of a second.

Although both approaches have successfully produced fusion products, so far all experiments have consumed far more energy than they have produced. A significant milestone will be achieved when a "break-even" reaction occurs; that is, when the power released will be equal to the power needed to initiate the reaction. Most experts believe this will occur first in the Tokamak Fusion Test Reactor by mid 1983.

Regardless of which method achieves break-even conditions first, many engineering problems remain to be solved before a practical fusion power plant can be built, not the least of which is converting the output of the reaction to useful utility-grid power at prices competitive with alternate energy production

methods. Experts forecast that this will happen around the turn of the century.

While fusion researchers are frantically trying to achieve star-like conditions in the laboratory, other teams of scientists are trying to efficiently harness the power from nature's own fusion power plant — the Sun. The Sun, for all practical purposes, is nothing more than a "king size" hydrogen bomb, massive enough that its explosive products are held in place by its own gravitational field. It has been exploding continuously at a rate of several billion megatons/sec for the last five billion years and it has a long way to go. Here then is another inexhaustible source of energy.

A new slant on tapping this energy became popular when Dr. Peter Glaser of the Arthur D. Little Corporation suggested in 1968 that a large (approximately 20 square mile) array of photovoltaic cells could be placed in a geosynchronous orbit to collect and convert sunlight to electricity. The electricity in turn would be converted to a microwave beam and transmitted to Earth based receivers where it would be reconverted to electricity and put on the nation's power grid. One of these power satellites would deliver 5,000 megawatts — enough to supply half the power requirements of New York City. Forty-five of these satellites could satisfy nearly all the energy needs of the United States.

If the Sun's energy is to be utilized, why not do it on Earth and save the cost of putting a power station in orbit? There are several reasons:

A ground station requires large amounts of land — much more than that required by the satellite. Also ground stations only receive sunlight during the day under clear weather conditions, while the power satellite would be exposed 99% of the time and would be unsusceptible to atmospheric conditions. Earth based microwave receivers for the satellite's energy would be located in areas where the sky was usually clear, but even under overcast conditions, the microwave radiation would still penetrate, suffering only minor attenuation. Finally, since ground stations only receive sunlight intermittently and may be dormant for long periods, they will require a large

energy storage system at a substantial cost penalty that does not occur for the space based system.

But is a space based system really feasible? A 1975 NASA study determined that the proposal is not only feasible, but the first satellite could be transmitting power to the Earth by 1990. Moreover, no new technological breakthroughs are necessary. Only moderate improvements to existing technology would be required. And the means for assembling these satellites will be available in early 1981 when the first Space Shuttle flight to orbit will take place. Using the existing shuttle, several hundred flights would be required to assemble a 5,000 megawatt power satellite. Larger shuttles have been proposed that would substantially reduce the number of flights.

The most significant question is not can it be done, but is it economically practical? More specifically, is it competitive with existing power generation systems? In April, 1978, the newly formed Sunset Energy Council, consisting of 25 scientific and industrial organizations, estimated that the satellite's cost would be \$1,700/KW, which compares favorably with the normal \$1,400/KW cost for conventional nuclear power plants. This however, only covers the cost to construct the power plant. It must also be capable of delivering power at a competitive price. The Boeing Corporation, under a \$1,000,000 NASA contract, concluded that the satellites could supply electricity at the rate of 0.3 cents/KW-hr. This value is consistent with current rates for oil-burning plants.

Also important in any cost analysis is the fact that the technology is young and will undoubtedly improve which will result in still lower energy costs. Some of these improvements have already been assumed and indeed some have already occurred, particularly in the manufacturing of photovoltaic cells.

The most significant cost factor, included as part of the \$1,700/KW, is the cost of lifting the hardware into space (approximately 100,000 metric tons for a 10 billion watt system). Early in the space program, the cost to lift a payload to orbit was about \$500,000/lb. This cost dropped to about \$10,000/lb. in the early 1960's using the Thor launch vehicle. The Saturn vehicle of the late 1960's reduced costs to about \$660/lb., and the cost using the Space

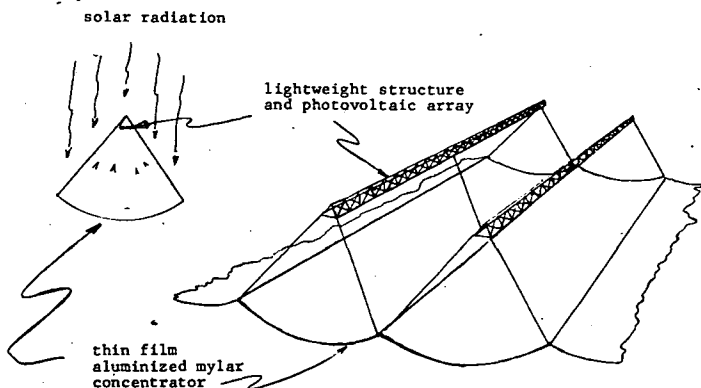
Shuttle is projected to be around \$150/lb. In the next decade, several proposals call for advanced vehicles that experts feel will reduce the cost to somewhere around \$15/lb.

This number is quite believable when one considers that it is simply the cost associated with changing the energy state of the payload. In other words, it takes some minimum amount of energy to lift a payload to a certain altitude and to accelerate it to orbital velocity. This is precisely the difference in the energy state of an object on the surface of the Earth and the same object in Earth orbit. And this difference for an object in Earth orbit of, say, 200 miles is approximately 4 KW-hr. — *a little more than a dime's worth of energy at current utility rates.* In other words, a bit more than ten cents a pound represents the theoretical limit. This number is instructive in that it tells us that present systems are still very inefficient and there is much room for improvement.

Until we find a better way we are still stuck with the present inefficiencies of rocket propulsion, and the success of Space Power Stations will depend largely on reducing system weight. One scheme, that could potentially result in significant weight, and therefore cost reductions for the satellite solar power systems, would replace many of the costly and relatively heavy photovoltaic cells with a lightweight and low cost thin film reflector. The reflector, shaped as a parabolic trough, would force solar radiation onto a linear array of fewer photovoltaic cells as shown in Figure 2. Most reflector concepts, however, still turn out to be rather heavy, requiring a rigid surface and support structure and would offer no real advantages over the current proposals.

But an amazing thing happens when a thin reflective film, supported only at its edges, is loaded by a constant force, such as provided by solar radiation pressure, over each horizontal unit of distance. It forms a parabolic shape. Just about now many readers will be jumping up and down saying, "What's this guy talking about? A thin film is just like a flat cable and everybody who has had any physics knows that a cable supported at both ends hangs in the shape of a catenary defined by hyperbolic functions, etc., etc., etc."

FIGURE 2. Ultralightweight Space Power System



But wait! When you speak of a hanging cable, film, or whatever, you are talking about a uniform load across its *length* (in this case, its weight per unit length). On the other hand, when we load (in zero gravity) a reflective film with solar radiation, the loading is constant across the *projected horizontal distance* — a subtle difference, but just enough to change a catenary to a parabola. This is indeed a fortuitous and somewhat poetic result since the *momentum* of the solar photons is now being used to shape the device that will extract energy from these same photons.

In geosynchronous orbit the solar radiation intensity is 1,400 watts per square meter, which when reflected will produce a pressure of nearly one dyne for each square meter of reflector surface. This is approximately equivalent to the force exerted by a mosquito in full flight. A .0005 inch thick aluminized mylar film weighs .055 lbs. per square meter which when exposed to solar radiation will experience an acceleration of about .0004 gees. This in turn means that in one to five minutes, depending on its size, a flimsy reflective film will take the shape of a parabolic trough. Concentration levels from 10:1 to 50:1 are possible without seriously overheating the photovoltaic cells (they lose efficiency when they get hot).

Finally, an additional bonus is realized with this system in that damaging short wavelength ultra-violet rays will pass through the thin reflective coating and therefore will not be directed to the cells.

These rays produce very little electricity and are one of the major causes of cell degradation.

I have estimated that a Satellite Power Station weight savings of 25 to 50 percent is possible using the photon loaded thin film concentrator approach. If this proves to be true, the cost of constructing the SPS will be less than the \$1,400/KW for nuclear power plants.

Before implementing a full scale SPS, an additional factor must be considered — and this is the biggie. What about environmental effects? What will be the long term effects of microwave radiation on life near the vicinity of the beam? What effect will it have on the weather, the ozone layer, etc? These questions are vital and could be the system's coup-de-grace. However, preliminary studies seem to indicate that the effects would be minor if any. Additional studies will be required to be certain.

Should the answers to these questions prove favorable, there is little doubt that the system will be implemented, for the bottom line is economics, and the numbers look too good to ignore. Perhaps it will be a close race between Earth based fusion power and space based solar power. More than likely both will be utilized until one demonstrates a clear advantage over the other. Furthermore, both will yield spinoffs which in themselves will justify the investment.

For example, fusion power plants may turn out to be the ultimate garbage disposal, for nothing can survive the fury of

the fusion furnace. Everything would be reduced to fundamental elements. Moreover, fusion technology will most certainly be just the tip of the iceberg for a whole new science of applied nuclear chemistry where nuclear transmutation can change one element to another. Even today, the neutrons from the fusion reaction can be utilized to transform long half-life radioactive waste to more benign elements. It may ultimately lead to the alchemist dream where any element can be transformed to any other element. In this case, resource shortages will be a thing of the past and the value of an element will be determined simply by its stored nuclear energy which will be approximately the amount of energy required to produce it.

And 23,000 miles above the Earth the large power plants will give new impetus to the space program. People will learn to live and work in orbiting colonies. Soon factories will follow, freeing the Earth of pollution. New resources will become available.

Hazardous, but potentially beneficial research programs such as recombinant DNA studies can be conducted in isolated space laboratories. We will have our cake and eat it too. But most important of all, humanity will not have all its eggs in one basket. Redundancy will be established and the chances for humanity's survival and eventual expansion to a galactic culture will be assured.

J. Ray Dettling

Dettling is currently working on advanced propulsion systems three days a week. On the other extreme, he has been playing with a five-piece band one night a week. He also lectures, and is completing a book, "Futures Fantastic," upon which this series is based. Most of the remaining time is allocated to completing construction of the family home located in the Saratoga foothills of California. ●

Futurelines

We perceive the black woman
in the world of winter-white
freezing sunblood and corpse-chilled.
Making love is an excuse for warmth.

We intermingle with the floods of
winter-weary foreigners in this
solemn smoky city that once was the
capital of those lost dusky empires.

We have become a cosmopolitan race,
sharing our identity with those who
we had once wished to make faceless,
yet becoming only faceless and lost ourselves.

And now, we ask, who are we? And
amongst our subjects, we are lost,
we are native to those lands we had
conquered, we are absorbed in absorption.



2

Forests.

The lord of everwhen
strides
placing his grey boots
with
the greatest precision.

Castles.

The children of time
love.
on beds of sticky-wet
leaves
smelling sweat and nature.

Starships.

The Priestess holds a
star
in her dust-heat red
hands
and preys upon the hero.

Galaxies.

The black-garbed god
ponders
the nature of himself
daring
to be mildly puzzled.

Lovers.

They are now all races
harmonizing
within themselves and
loving
for the sake of time.

Battles.

The lord of all time
dreams
levitating a bubble of
memory
and plunging deep within.

Mysteries.

And for the sake of our
tomorrows
we bare our arms and
plummet
into the search for truth.

3

Kisses from silver lips
and a jolt of power in the
sensitive secret centers of
this modified cyborg brain.
A novaplosion of gyrating
passion and circuits shiver
shimmer quiver and glimmer.
Yesterday's love so uncomplex
and clumsily entertaining —
my love leaves no lingering
aftertaste in my metal mouth.

4

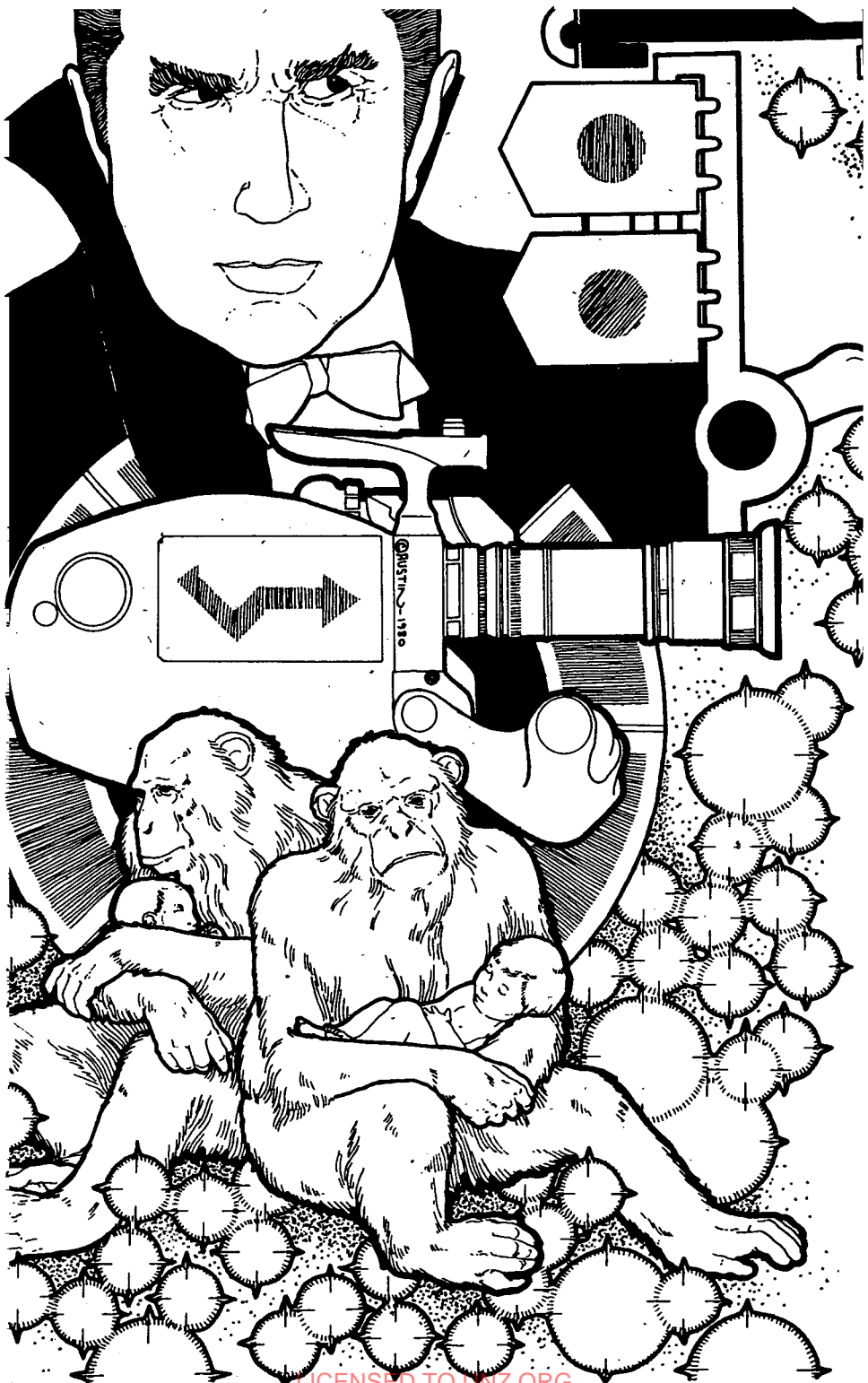
It's a future:

yonder in the asteroids,
a fat little man hangs
arsey-versey and hammers
with a glittery golden
sword of coherent light,
searching for minerals.
Someone whispered once
that California was to
be found anew, here,
and so we loaded up our
conestoga rocketships
and headed for the gold
mines lying whirligig in
the great black starry
expanses between Master
Mars and Muddah Jupiter.

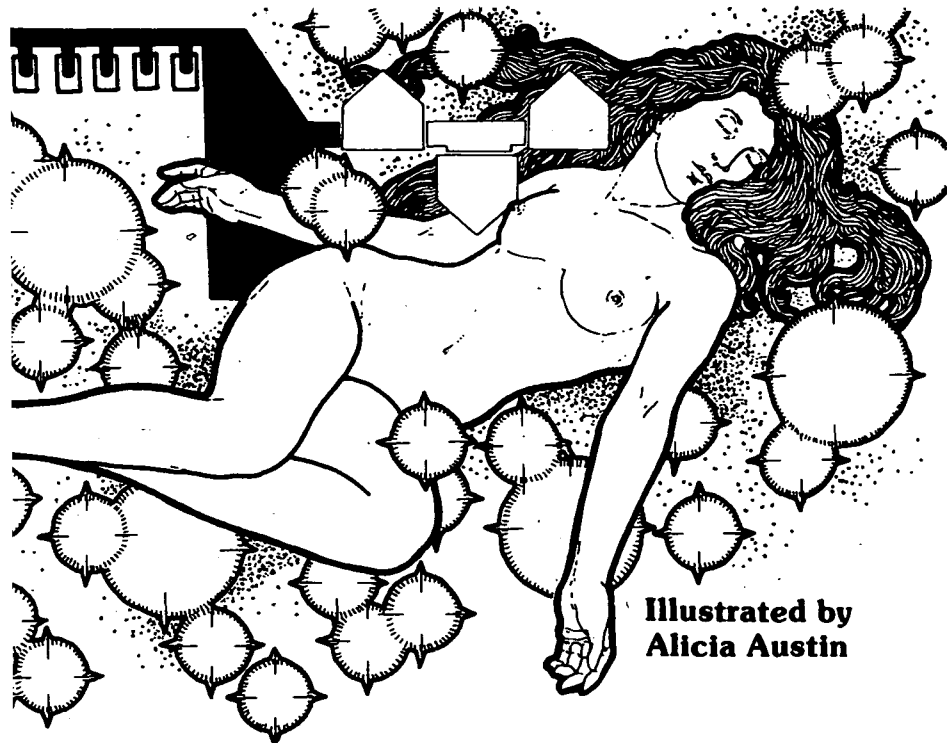
It's a living:

yonder against a black rock,
a fat old little feller
hangs arsey-versey while
smashing at the granite
with a sputtery gold torch
of laser light and he curses
for his lack of comfort and
the crick in his back and
the sweat trickling along
his ribs and the itch in
his buzzard's-beak nose that
can't be scratched for hours.
He wonders, without romance,
why he has come to this here
claim of fool's gold, this hell
in space, this idiot's paradise.

— Steven Edward McDonald



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Illustrated by
Alicia Austin

the Vampire of mallworld

Clement barJulian was a quadrillionaire with eyes in the back of his head. I was a reporter for the Holothrills-National Enquirer Syndicate, stiffly snapping at my live turtle soup in the middle of a gourmet restaurant in the middle of a thirty-klick-long shopping center floating in space, trying to get the man to talk about a vampire — and he wasn't talking.

"I hate to presume on our old friendship. . . ." I was saying. Above, a holoZeiss projected a shimmering stardome. My turtle swam half-heartedly in its bowl of bluish nutriliquid, and I was only waiting for it to hold still a moment so I could jab it with my fork.

"You presume," said Clement barJulian, "too far. There is no vampire in Mallworld." The candlelight flared up for a moment, playing flicker-shadow with his face. It was of course, a deliberately contrived effect; I knew that Clement liked to affect a menacing mien. "Go home, Milton. Aren't you supposed to be covering the atrocities of the seven-veiled sect or something?"

Somtow Sucharitkul

THE VAMPIRE OF MALLWORLD 23

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"Yes, I was. But they assigned someone else. Got some kind of notion that I'm slipping. . . hell, Clement, you've seen the ratings! I'm only the most popular holovee personality in the solar system! Remember when I covered the time in Mallworld when the mini-demat booths backfired and left six hundred shoppers minus their heads? Remember when the Selespridon governor of Sol System was molested by a hundred girl scouts from bible belt? And here I am investigating filler material. Sticking me with a moderately gory carnival act when I could be covering the war in Luna or interviewing a Selespridon. . ." Carefully I maneuvered myself to get some good shots of barJulian. I was incognito, of course, covered with mounds of plastiflesh; indeed, the pot belly I'd snapped over my well-muscled torso was a pouch to carry my camera in, and it was operating surreptitiously through my navel.

"Always whining, Milton Huang, always whining," said Clement barJulian, as he slurped the last of his Denebian whiteworms. "I know very well that whenever you get a Mallworld story you come to me first and whine and hope I'll bail you out — not to mention that I own a not bad share of the networks. But I've never heard of a vampire in Mallworld, and I don't even rightly know what one is — some kind of geek, no? — and if anyone would know I would." He was right; his family owned Mallworld. He was worth enough to buy Phobos and Deimos and use them for juggling balls. And yet — he was edgier than I'd ever seen him. He'd always been very cordial with me, though you can't really ever tell what the super-rich have clicking in their minds. But today he was downright hostile. Was there something going on?

"I'll investigate, of course," I said. My career was slipping and I could hardly do otherwise.

"That," said Clement portentously, "is life."

It was a relief to step out of the Galaxy Palace restaurant. Clement barJulian owned it, of course. It was the only place in existence where you could see the stars — the way they used to look, before the Selespridar came and shunted everything inside the orbit of Saturn into a pocket universe "for our own good" — projected via the last surviving holoZeiss recording. It's a beautiful restaurant; depressing, too. I'd gotten some good establishing shots there — only 2D unfortunately, but they could be superimposed into a holocollage, very in and arty that year, back at the studio.

Once in the corridor —

Mallworld was as it always was. Crazy-gravi corridors corkscrewing precariously and mobiusstripping around starlight corridors lined with demat booths, and you could look up and see level after level after level on either side of you, vanishing into infinity, above and below; signs yelling at you, garish holoads with sensual young men and women selling perfume, airbeds, spacecars, relics of the cross, pet salamanders, laxatives, compact sensuo-surrogates for asteroid miners, rut pills, skating gloves — and the people, streaming by like space truckers' convoys, and the robots weighed down with shopping bags, and the jabbering, the jabbering. . .

Setting off at random — figured I should do some more establishing shots — I found a courtyard with upside-down fountains. An orchestra of Rigellian semisentients was playing squeaky music from their synthesizing rituals.

Perhaps I've been a little too Machiavellian, going straight to barJulian, straight to the top like this — I thought. Resolutely I turned to summon a comsim. Why not try the direct approach?

The comsim landed on my shoulder, a bearded six-inch man in pink.

"Hello. I am computer simulacrum MALLGUIDE 227719," it buzzed. "Can I help you?"

"Yes. Uh, where's the Vampire?"

"Hee!" it snickered, fluttering around my head. "You must be loaded! Show me your thumb."

Satisfied by my creditworthiness, it went on, "Honored sir . . ." it had suddenly become very obsequious, being programmed to react favorably to well-heeled thumbprints. . . "I cannot talk. But for one of such a bottomless expense account . . ."

"What do you mean, you can't talk?"

"You will be contacted!" And it was gone. I hadn't even been able to turn quickly enough to get a good angle through the camera eye in my navel.

All there was left to do was find a hotel and wait, so I got into a booth and asked for the Gaza Plaza, and in a split second I was walking into the hotel that was a scale model of the Great Pyramid of Khufu. Or perhaps it was the Great Pyramid — the ads werè deliberately ambiguous there.

I felt a bit strange in the pyramid-shaped room, which was kept at a half-gee for comfort. There was a crazy, queasy feeling in my stomach. . . but wait! It wasn't the gravity!

All right, you can come out now, I subvocalized. My belly ripped open at the command from my throat gizmo, and my camera flopped all over the bed, wires and tentacles and micromikes wriggling like a Medusa's head.

"Well," I said. "What do you make of it all?"

"Pretty weird," it said. "I still think it's a hoax, but what do I know."

"Hell," I said, "it's just some guy drinking blood. Why should Clement bar-Julian get all defensive about it? And what about all this cloak and dagger stuff with the comsims? I don't like it. . ."

Suddenly all the lights went out. "What the . . ." I stuttered, thinking, *Uh oh, not a repeat of last season's blackout!*

An eerie green light flickered on, cold and faint as in a dream. Then a comsim matted in: almost a foot tall, hovering in the air, with a dark black cloak that trailed behind him and rippled ever so gently. Its eyes were closed, and its lips were thin, red, sensuous.

"Quick, Clunko, get this on tape!" I murmured.

"Whaddya think I'm doing, dummy?"

I just stared and stared at the comsim. I almost recognized it; it was like a forgotten childhood image, an old story, a racial memory even.

The eyes flashed open. They were bloodshot. I was transfixed. Terror lanced my stomach for a wild moment before I could regain control.

Then —

A horrible cackle reverberated around the room, the mouth opened, the hideous fangs glistened, death-white, the eerie light shifting, darkening, gigantic shadows twisting. . .

"Good evening," it said. A sinuous, cold voice. "I am a comsim reproduction of Bela Bartok, the most famous Vampire of the ancient earthmyths. If you will kindly follow me, we will demat into the Cellars of doom. . . participation is twelve credits only, observation twelve thousand credits to ensure only the most discriminating clientele. . . and now, the secret Vault of Horror of the Way Out Corporation. Your credit identification, please. . . this way! this way! this way!"

So this was it! I resisted an impulse to clutch Clunko's tentacles; abandoned myself to a deliciously creepy shudder; and followed the comsim through a wall

that had begun to shimmer and turn to mist.

TIRED OF LIFE? said the sign in a mellow, father-image sort of voice. **WHY NOT...KILL YOURSELF? 300 WAYS POSSIBLE AT THE WAY OUT CORP! MOST REVERSIBLE! MONEY BACK GUARANTEE IF STILL ALIVE AFTER PROCESSING!**

I noted with some perplexity that The Way Out Corp. was a subsidiary of the Clement barJulian Group. "The plot thickens," I subvoked to Clunko the camera. I'd discarded my pot belly and donned a cloth-of-iridium loinshield; Clunko clattered behind. I still did not dare reveal my true face, of course, since I had some pretty overpowering fans.

Our personal comsim led us inside. Abruptly, a soundscreen cut off the crowd and we were each immersed in our own little silence.

"Your seat, sir," said the comsim resonantly. A dim green light shone on an antique coffin, done up to make a padded couch.

"Yes, but what about the Vam . . ." He had dematted. I found a piece of paper with writing on it on the couch, program notes or something; since I can't read, of course, I scrunched it up and threw it behind me.

Okay, I subvoked. *Spread yourself out and start shooting.* Clunko subdivided into little cells — ah, the miracle of subatomic circuitry! — and began to drift around the place. For holovee you need at least four or five shooting angles or you can't get good "in-the-round" feeling.

In the dimness I could make out some breathing. When my eyes adjusted I saw others in the audience. The bored and rich, all of them. Not since Pope Joan the Fifteenth's funeral had I seen such an array of garish clothing and outlandish, extravagant soma-models: purple skins, vestigial heads and other paraphernalia, grafted-on limbs and appendages, lewd-looking women wearing gilded potato-sacks, and all of them heaving with a sort of vulture-like ecstasy. I even saw a Selespridon, occupying a couch by himself — tall, blue-skinned and magenta-haired and looking decidedly uncomfortable. A subtle, sickly-sweet odor pervaded everything. It was so dark there wasn't any scale to it; I mean, there could have been thousands of people there...I subvoked an ampli-command to the olfacto track: there's nothing better than a wicked, nasty smell on holovee to really drive a point home...

A voice broke the silence. It came from everywhere at once, as the darkness deepened still more.

"Humans, aliens and semi-sentients," it began, "we are proud to present a genuine reconstruction of the day-to-day life of an ancient mythic Vampire. The Vampire of Earth — whose name has come down to us in various forms as Bella Abzug, Bela Bartok and Clarabelle — was a monstrous alien who devoured...human blood.

"Today we have the Vampire of Mallworld. A psychopath of unknown origin, this Vampire came to The Way Out Corp. wishing for a release from life. Today, instead, he has earned a permanent place to live out his dread fantasies...all his victims are our customers. All the death scenes are genuine, and no victim will be revived; each has signed an irreversible contract with The Way Out. We warn you — many who have come to watch as members of the audience have eventually found their way onto the stage of death!...and we sincerely hope that the desperadoes, the depressed, the schizoid, and the merely bored among you will think of us, when the time comes for you to seek — *The Way Out!*"

Spotlight on a single coffin on a dias, old and dirty. The audience was quite still. Slowly, agonizingly slowly, the lid creaked open. The sound system was hyperamped to give you the shivers. It creaked . . . creaked . . . and then crashed

onto the floor.

Very slowly he stood up. He was tall, over two meters. A black cloak flapped from his shoulders. His face was painted white, unearthly white with a flowing tinge of green. It was a long, bleak face, the black hair merging with the black cape, the lips Mars-red and seductive, the eyes empty, dead. He hardly seemed to notice the audience.

"The first victim," said the announcer. "Miss Emily Smith."

A little old granny tottered onto the stage. She was shaking all over as she crossed the stage's lines of shadow. The Vampire took her into his arms, towering above her. She seemed to see nothing but his compelling eyes.

Teeth glistened. She whimpered once before he ripped her apart, and then she fell to the ground with a crash. A robot dragged off the body.

That's all? I was thinking. I looked around; couples in the audience were intertwined, some shamelessly indulging in erotic little games. *Talk about the rich and bored!* Clunko buzzed in my ear. *Shut up, I subvoked. Keep filming.*

A few more victims, mostly women. And then — number ten or eleven, I forget the name, but she was shatteringly beautiful, only a girl. . . she wore a white gown, and her long black hair streamed behind her in the stagewind they had set up for her. . . she just stood there, half in the shadow, deep brown eyes moist and meltingly lovely, and I was on the edge of my seat. So was the audience. A throaty murmur escaped them, was stifled.

"Come, my dear, my little one . . ." The voice was heard for the first time, and the sound system distorted it into a terrifying, nightmare voice. She advanced as though hypnotized. The Vampire caressed her face with a large, slender hand that half-glowed with some luminous greasepaint; they embraced chastely, then more passionately, and then she was flinging aside her gown and he was biting her all over, and pools of red were spreading all over the white, and her sighs turned into shrieks of terror —

The whole audience cried out all at once. She flopped lifeless to the floor.

A burst of thunderous applause, cheering, the Vampire bowed and dematted and the lights came blindingly on —

"We hope that you have had a pleasant fright," the announcer said warmly, "and thank you so much for choosing The Way Out Corp. for your entertainment today. . . Good Evening."

I glanced cursorily at the audience. Many were still under the spell. Then I got up to look for the stage door.

This was stupendous! This man had turned a simple geek act into a work of art. I could imagine him wowing them all on the lunchtime news now — the ratings'd put our rivals Astroco in the sanitization club for bankruptcy. Mind you, he was a psychotic. . . but one might daydream. He had an air about him. There was no vulgarity here. This had power. This had panache. This had class.

It wasn't just a filler. This had to be a special. Pocket History of Earth's ancient Vampires. Panel of psychologists — human and robot. The works. There was a fortune here, if only I could get the right angle on it.

. . . found a little autodoor that whispered STAGE DOOR, AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY, so I muttered "Holovee, holovee" in that urgent, well-rehearsed tone of voice that I always used to get into forbidden places. It accor-dioned open. Then it banged shut behind me and Clunko, and I took a look.

I found the Vampire alone, being helped off with his clothes by a rusty-looking robot. Everything stunk of poverty and degradation in the dressing room. Cloaks and props cluttered up every centimeter of the floor. And then I looked at the Vampire's face.

He was standing in front of a mirror. I saw him first in the mirror, a dazed, sad face, a trace of blood on his lips. With a shock, I realized he was only a meter fifty tall or so. He'd been wearing levi-boots.

He had an earnest young face, mousy hair, freckles, a mild, undernourished look. . .

"You the Vampire?" I couldn't believe it.

"I'm the Vampire," he said sadly. The robot had whisked the cloak away and he stood naked in front of me. His soma was emaciated, pitiful. I was still in shock as he went on. "I don't know how you got in. . ."

"I'm Milton Huang!"

"Who?" The man didn't even watch holovee.

"I'm a holovee personality. I want to do a special on you. You look like you could use the money," I added in a confidential sort of tone. "Listen, what do I call you? Mr. Vampire? Vampey?"

"My name is Federico barJulian," he said emotionlessly, "and my friends usually call me Fred. But then again I have no friends."

I was shaking inside, the way you always do when a terrific humdinger of a story is about to break. "You're . . . a *barJulian*?" How could the scion of one of the richest families in the universe —

"I told you. My father owns the place. Now leave me alone."

"You're *Clement's* kid?"

"*Leave me alone!*" I saw his face freeze and a look of deep tragedy come over it. It would be perfect for holovee; this man was a born actor. Lucky he didn't know everything was being committed to tape. "Can't you people leave me in peace?" he said. "You've already turned me into a ridiculous parody, a stage show, forcing me to debase myself because of my terrible hunger. . ."

"Look, I just want to do some filming. Name your price, for God's sake! Holothrills-National Enquirer is willing to pay any amount within reason. . . ." I walked around him slowly, thinking, *Why does he need to do this? With his kind of credit he could buy up an azroid full of pretty people and bite them all to death.*

As if in answer to my thoughts, he said, "I've been disowned. Father wishes to hush me up completely. I make a living the only way I know how." The pathos was just stunning. Loonies are always good material; they're so unpredictable, so *genuine*. And a quadrillionaire loonie geek was the acme of ratingsworthiness.

He stared me full in the face and said, "I just want to be normal."

"Huh?" I was taken aback. "You can't mean that. Hell, look at what you've got; they all love you out there. Your show has everything an audience could possibly want: a little bit of sex, a little bit of sadism, and a whole lot of archetypal, mythic mystery. . . come on," I said frustratedly, "you can't be *that* psychotic. Money's money."

"But you don't *understand*," he said, practically in tears. Nothing could have been further from the imposing, terrifying figure he had portrayed only a moment before. "I loathe this life. I don't want to be a freak! I want to be normal! Help me! Help me!" And he had gripped my arm so tight that it was hurting. Gently I twisted loose. I took a long, stern look at everything I'd seen. Should I cut my losses. . . and lose the most potentially staggering holovee special I'd ever had the chance to make? There was pathos in the way this little man, childlike and torn by uncontrollable desires, was weeping his heart out in the dressing room. There was tragedy, even depth.

Then I got my brainstorm.

"Look here," I said, "we'll get you cured! We'll buy you the best psychocomputer in Mallworld. We'll have experts come and root out every trauma, every

complex. We'll even slip you back into society afterwards; we've got the megacreds to do it, and . . ."

"There's a price," he said truculently. "There's always a price."

"Let us tape everything."

"Well . . ." I saw a little gleam in his eye now, and smiled smugly. How well I knew in those days that *everything* has its price.

Taking advantage of his confusion, I went on quickly: "Why, don't you see? As a sensation show it's pretty cool. We could maybe get a thirty-five to forty on the ratings. But as *human-interest* — the private anguish of your tormented soul as it finally finds peace — it's incredible! I can see the whole thing," I went on, losing all caution in my enthusiasm, "a three-hour feelietape special. We can get the sponsors: hell, The Way Out Corp. will do it for the publicity, maybe even the Vatican! The eyes of billions, in their living rooms, in their spacecars, in their azroid hideouts, eyes, ears, tacto-olfacto electrodes all glued to the holoscreen, from Titan to Mercury . . . 'The Vampire of Mallworld finds truth and meaning, and a new life.' It's warm — it's wonderful —"

"Help me! Oh; help me!" cried the Vampire of Mallworld.

TIME PASSED and the best psychocomps in Mallworld were unable to extract any but the most extraneous information from Fred. We drugged him with every drug we could think of. We had him trussed up in a booth on the fifteenth level of Auntie Annetta's Do-It-Yourself Shrink Shack, alternately pumping him with sensory dep and sensory overload. A biochemcomp stood by, flashing every molecule of his endocrine system on to a strobomanic vidscreen. Even tried some Mediaeval therapy from an old recipe book where you electrocute the victim — patient — half to death. . . I toyed with the idea of getting help from the Selespridar, even. . .

The best shrink shack in Mallworld was by definition the best shrink shack in the solar system, and this was all it yielded:

Federico barJulian had shown a propensity for bloodletting and other violence from the earliest. He was a virgin at twenty-two, twice the normal age. His obsession had crystallized when he watched some ancient two-dimensional tapes of mythological vampire epics from earth: his favorite was a character called Dracula after whom he was later to model his act most consciously. Every six hours, the hunger would come upon him and he would rush down to the suicide parlour for another session. They were certainly milking him for all he was worth, paying him peanuts, and screwing the creditfull thumbs of some fairly heavyweight clients. . . the Selespridon, a xeno-anthropologist, for instance, being one of the regulars. The six hours interval between each feeding session was totally reliable. You could tell time by him. In fact, I gave up checking my eyelid calendar completely.

For a person with such a peculiar social problem, he was astonishingly sane: witty, full of tragicomic one-liners, and a great holovee personality. He seemed undaunted at first by the constant failure of the therapy machines. I had a great time with his steadfastness, his courage, his obvious longing to be normal. But it was all wearing thin, and you don't make a good holovee show with failure. The audience has to have a satisfying climax and denouement, or you're stuck with three hours of pathos and gore and sex and human frailty and witty characterization and not a peg to hang the story on. . .

My boss called me while I was taking a respite in the hotel's automassage-sauna. It was a transmat call; must have cost a fortune, all for the convenience of

not having to wait ten minutes in between remarks. The boss materialized right in the middle of my tub of water. It was only a holomage, but nonetheless unnerving.

"Got anything yet?"

"We're working on it. . ."

"Now see here, Huang!" The boss began to gyrate wildly around his tripod. "I don't want to catch sight of you in a sauna again, you hear? You've run way over budget and I'm giving you a hundred hours —" Abruptly his twenty seconds were up.

It's hard working for a machine; they have no sense of human dignity.

That was the day some kind of breakthrough happened —

I was too depressed after the boss called, thinking of my career going to seed and my ratings tumbling. After being poked and prodded by machines, Fred was not feeling too hot either, so we decided to walk through Mallworld. We floated through the corridors in a pola-bubble, because I'd donned my all-too-familiar true somatype and I didn't want to be mobbed by the fans.

"It's not Bela Bartok anyway," he was saying, "it's Bela someone-else. They don't give a damn about accuracy at the Way Out; all they care for is their lousy show."

We turned a corner and sailed past the Galaxy Palace restaurant. We both shuddered, knowing who owned the place. I was becoming quite fond of Fred, even outside my professional capacity. We streaked past a bevy of shopping bags, their wares fairly bursting their seams, sauntering down a slidewalk as if they owned the place. A huge animated tomato demonstrated dance-steps on a whirling dais flanked by twittering comsims. Up a crazy-gravi corridor that gravi-flipped so we saw the whole world upside-down —

"Tired of this?" I said.

"Yeah. How about some nature?" We turned in to the Earthscape Safari Park.

There, striding boldly out of a holographic sea, one of Mallworld's most famous landmarks; the Statue of Limitations, matroness of merchants and thieves. . .

As we winged down a kilomet-wide pathway lined on either side with Grecian columns, with lions (actually leonoids) and tigroids and zebroids and okapoids and crocodiloids acting out the primal drama of nature, and shadows from distant duelling triceratopoids blotching the wild wheat-brown savannah, we did not speak much. I saw that Fred was moved by what he saw. I sensed that he felt as they did, was part of this savage world. And then, without warning —

"Mommy!" he shrieked. He crushed me in his arms and tried to bite me, then began to wail like a baby and press hard against my chest, sobbing, "Mommy, Mommy. . ."

"What's wrong?" I looked ahead and saw nothing but a herd of chimpanzoids, playfully cavorting inside a plastiflesh carcass of an elephant.

"Mommy —"

I was shaken. I mean, I knew he was crazy, but he'd never acted crazy before, except for this little quirk of sucking people's blood. I tried to calm him down, but he would not rest until we had gone way past the chimpanzoid exhibit, into the aquarium hall where they showed dozens of fish being happily devoured by larger and larger fish. . .

This new turn of events would keep the studio happy for a day or two. But now we needed results, and fast.

I beckoned to Clunko, who was trotting along behind, and asked for its advice. Meanwhile, Fred was staring at the chains of fish eating fish, smiling happily to himself.

"Maybe he was raised by apes in the jungle —" my camera began.

"Oh, be quiet."

"And acquired carnivorous habits, and when he was adopted back into civilization . . ."

"Watch enough ancient twodee tapes, you'll soon be crazy as he is," I snapped. "Besides, he only bites humans. And, we found out that he was born right here in Mallworld, at Storkways Inc., in fact, who have never been known to deliver a defective baby —"

"Or so they claim."

"He's never so much as stepped off this thirty-klick hunk of metal! And what place could be safer than Mallworld? Where in hell could he possibly have picked up a chimpanzee-specific mother-surrogate response? I think . . . that it's time for a human psychiatrist, Clunko."

"A witch doctor?"

"Don't be silly. They have had human psychiatrists for centuries . . ."

"What are you, some kind of back-to-nature ecologizer?"

"You machines are such impossible chauvinists," I said, thinking of my boss.

We spent the day trying to relax: watched leonoid eat leonoid, vulturoid eat vulturoid, sharkoid eat sharkoid, and, in a rousing climax to the park's entertainments, a passably convincing tyrannosauroid eat tyrannosauroid. . . and then Fred shambled off to assuage his six-hourly hunger, and I went off to look up Dr. Emmanuel Varhite. He and I had gone to St. Martin Luther King's Exclusive Strict and Snooty School when we were kids, so presumably he — like Clement barJulian himself — was on the Old Boy Network.

I found him running a psychiatric concession at Gimble and Gamble's Department Store and Feeliepalace on level T67. He'd come down in the world, and had also grown inordinately portly. He accepted the case at once, insisting only on one condition: that Holothrills buy him at least one meal a day at the Galaxy Palace restaurant. That was how low he had sunk, my old schoolmate. It was his own fault for picking such a pointless career, though. As useful to have chosen alchemy or window-washing, or to have learned how to read.

A FEW HOURS later, Emmanuel Varhite was wolfing down Denebian whiteworms with great relish beneath the dome of artificial stars in Clement bar-Julian's restaurant. We had a table right beneath the starfield, and special wraparound seats that really felt snug. Invisible, too — they were Selespridon force-mechanisms — they made us look as though we were spacing out on Levitol. Clunko was casually disguised among the cutlery. Above, the "stars" shone — fake, but still beautiful. It was a masterstroke, I thought, to film in the Galaxy Palace: the stars were dazzling, and every human being yearns for these worlds outside our space and time. . .

Here the tables were turned, and we, the underdogs, got served by real people dressed in exotic alien costumes. Probably inaccurate.

I'd settled for the echinoderms stuffed with soft-shell malaprops; Fred, in full Bella Abzug attire, was eating a steak. Rare.

Varhite, whose face resembled a trampled rosebush, was expostulating at the camera. "We know," he said, "that the subject likes to drink blood — preferably killing the victim in the process."

"Come on, Varhite!" I stage-whispered. "Try to sound a little more witch-doctorly . . . our audience can be a little dumb, you know?"

"Relaxen Sie . . . I mean, relax, my boy," he said, warming to the image I'd created for him. "There are other clues. For instance, he reacts violently to chim-

panzees, calling them 'Mommy, mommy' in a petulant child's voice . . . clearly an anguished plea from the Unconscious.

"He is a product of Storkways Incorporated, the most blue chip, influential baby factory in the Solar System, whose main showroom is, of course, in Mallworld . . ." as he spoke he never stopped sucking in the whiteworms as they wriggled in their death throes, thus releasing the intoxicating hormone that was the whole secret to their appeal . . . for sheer taste, give me spaghetti. "He first, as it were, concretized his urges when accidentally exposed to an old twodee movie. Now he watches it every day, in between meals, in his little oneroom apartment tucked inside the labyrinthine corridors of The Way Out Corp. And every six hours . . ."

"They've heard that."

"Now, from these few facts, what strange, tortuous, twisted trauma can we glean? Ah . . ."

"Not much to go on, is there, Doctor?" I said glumly. "Frankly, Doctor — my boss is thinking of dumping this whole project."

"And not cure me?" Fred suddenly looked up from his steak with those hopeless, despairing eyes . . .

"Come on kid," I said, patting his hand. "Doctor Varhite and I, we believe in you." At that moment, I confess to being moved. He seemed so helpless . . . a baby, really. Trying to look professional, I skewered another echinoderm, watching as it deflated in a messy splat of rheum. "We will cure you!" I was almost choking. I'd lived with this thing for days now.

"And yet," said Doctor Varhite, "it seems to be most difficult to isolate the primal trauma. It must be very deep, very deep."

I knew the Doctor was up to something, so I subvoked to my camera. Several forks and spoons levitated to surround the Doctor from all sides. He pulled out something from his armpit pouch and threw it on the table. It was an inflatable hologram. He touched the stud —

A chimpanzee was sitting on the table.

"We've already done this a hundred times, you don't have to be cruel . . ." I began.

And the Vampire screamed! He tried to clutch me, the empty hologram's throat, tried to bite it, began to sob. I was so involved, subvoking instructions to all my hardware, that it was practically happening to me. And then he sank down on the table, wracked by convulsions, as other diners on their motorized tables swung by to see what all the fuss was about.

"Ah ha!" Doctor Varhite cried. "Positively Pavlovian!"

Abruptly the screaming stopped. Fred pulled himself together, whispered "Mommy" very softly, and gathered his cloak up around himself. He stood erect and tall in his levi-boots, menacing in his deathpale makeup. His face seemed to shine with a pallid, luminous coldness.

"Blood," he whispered harshly. "Blood, blood, blood!"

Then he swept out of his seat and strode to a demat booth in the middle of the restaurant and disappeared, leaving behind him a giggling audience of diners.

"Well," I said, "that's another thing we know."

"Ja," said the Doctor, "regular as clockwork. In the middle of a word, in the middle of an action, when the six hours come, the urge comes. It's uncanny." With a fingertap he deflated his hologram.

"Well, let's go back to the hotel and talk more strategy, eh?" I said. But I wasn't feeling very hopeful.

"What about dessert?" I sighed; the contract was binding, of course, so we

ordered. While we were waiting, a six-inch-high hologram of my boss appeared on the table.

"Oh no," I gasped, "not another holo! And this time I'm going to get the convulsions."

"Huang!" spluttered the hologram. "Something terrible has happened! Holothrills-National Enquirer has been completely bought up by the Clement bar-Julian group!"

I could feel my stomach turn. "Does this mean . . ."

"Yes it does! Now look, you have twenty-four hours to come back to Söaprock, or your expense account is up. Orders from on high say you're fired . . . whatever the cost! Someone in the new administration's after your ass, Huang. Now this is a regular real-time call. I'm not waiting ten minutes just to see you answer, lounging about in a sauna or . . . dining at the Galaxy! I bet that's where you are, isn't it? Now see here . . ."

He vanished and was replaced by two chocolate sundaes.

I shuddered. There was my whole career, flashing before my eyes. I tried not to think at all, and applied myself greedily to the sundae, an exotic dish made entirely from the blubber of specially cloned whales.

"You see the situation I'm in," I said. "I've raised the kid's hopes sky-high and now I'm about to dash them all." Maybe I should have been thinking more about my own career than about Fred the Vampire. But I'd seen his show; I'd been touched by it. The kid had fallen all the way from riches to rags because of his obsession, yet . . . in the moment that he killed, he was a king. I'd seen it, I'd captured it on film, and I was starting to see him as a martyr symbol of the human race . . . or maybe just falling victim to my own skillfully worded holoscripts. I don't know.

"We still," Doctor Varhite said kindly, "have twenty-four hours."

"What can we do? We've tried everything!"

"Except . . . confrontation therapy."

"Oh?"

"I have already figured it out. This will be so dramatic that you can run to the competition with it if you have to . . ."

"BarJulian owns the competition."

"You want to help him, don't you? Regardless?"

"Regardless." I knew this was the wrong time for altruism, but I was in too deep to quit.

"Confrontation therapy was a popular Dark Ages treatment," Varhite explained as Clunko whirled around the table, "invented by one Marcus Welby, whose tapes have survived the ages in truncated form. It involves confronting the patient with the locale, the flavor, the presence of his infancy, in order to drive the hidden trauma or *engram* to the surface. Tomorrow, then, we will film at Storkways Inc.: and the patient will come to find himself, there, at the very moment of his birth."

"It sounds very far-fetched to me."

"My boy," he said, "what do you know about Storkways Inc.? Did you have the good fortune to be a Storkways child?"

"Of course not! I was born in the regular way, with an android host mother-surrogate, delivered by Caesarian straight into my mother's arms."

"That's the problem, then. You don't understand the peculiar loneliness, the angst, of a baby factory. I'm sure we can find an answer there . . . won't you give it a try?"

"What's in it for you, Emmanuel?"

He shrugged. "It's complicated. I guess I want to vindicate us 'witch doctors'

and destroy the ascendancy of the psychocomps. I've been on a downhill trend lately and I need something. And besides, another day of the Galaxy Palace's food. . . ."

Just then a waiter slunk up to our table. "Excuse me sir," he said, floundering about in his half-donned fuzzy suit. "Mr. barJulian has asked me to inform you that you and the Doctor are no longer welcome in this restaurant. A comsim will escort you. . . ."

With a grand gesture Doctor Varhite slung the remainder of his sundae in the waiter's face. He stood dazed for a moment, then toppled into a heap of arms, legs, fur and chocolate sauce.

Clunko had filmed the whole thing. "Bravo!" I said. "Let's get out of here."

"You have no idea," said Doctor Varhite, "how much it cost me to do that."

IT WAS A sorry troupe that matted on to level Y99 an hour or so later; we had just caught the last of Fred's act at The Way Out and he had just done away with a pair of beautiful tangerine-eyed twins. Varhite led the way through a conch-twisty passageway; I followed, not even caring that, even in my normal soma, I was not attracting the attention of any rabid fans. . . . Clunko trotted behind and the Vampire of Mallworld lagged in the rear. I knew I wouldn't get a chance to see the act again. . . . not at twelve kilocred a throw and no expense account — and so the killings had been tinged with an exquisite sadness. You might wonder why. . . . these people had elected, of their own free will, to die, and the exhibitions of suicide parlors are a natural consequence of man's innate commercialism. . . . but I found myself thrust into a state of profound longing which no competent newsman should have felt. I began to wonder about myself. Did I really belong in the holothrill trade?

Too soon we reached the lobby of Storkways Inc., a gigantic stylized uterus, painted pink, with transparent walk-levels jutting from the sides, which you approached from below by means of a diagonal slidewalk, through a tubular passageway. The symbolism lent a grave dignity to the proceedings. Storkways was the oldest of the baby production firms, and was known to be incorruptible. No one had ever purchased a faulty baby from Storkways. . . . or so they claimed. The primaeval womb would make an excellent final scene, I decided, my spirits lifting a little. I could almost hear the script: *Here, in the very womb of humanity.* . . .

I had to stop and remind myself that I was just doing the day's filming as an empty gesture, an attempt to wring every last microcred from the coffers of the company.

Soon we were greeted by a buxom, human attendant in an oversize diaper and nothing else. She was wearing Storkways' Radiant Motherhood Smile.

"Ah," she said, not at all perturbed by the strange sight of a Vampire in full regalia, a fat little psychoanalyst, a talking camera, and me.

"A charming menage you have here, I see! What kind of baby were you interested in, and at what price range?"

I looked a bit indecisive, I suppose, so she quickly went on, "Aquatics are 'in' this season, as are little fuzzies and of course our ever-popular 'normal' model, and. . . ."

She looked at us expectantly. The smile hadn't changed a bit; I knew that it had been soldered on surgically.

"Why don't you nice fellows just browse through our catalog?" she said. Instantly the air was full of holographic toddlers, solemnly filing past our faces. "Just point to the one you want. . . . oh! . . . you're. . . *Milton Huang!*" she shrieked.

suddenly.

It was the only good thing that had happened all day. "I'm sure you'll be wanting a custom-made, then," she said thoughtfully. "Are these your husbands?"

"Miss . . ."

"Could I have your thumbprint, please? Just a formality, credit check you know, and — well actually I wanted it for my collection, I watch your show almost every fourday . . ."

"We'd like to do some filming here. If you'll just thumb this release . . ." I fiddled around with spools of minitape from my loinsheild.

"O-o-o-o-oh!" She just stared at me, hardly taking in a word, while I explained the situation. "I'll get the manager. Oh, we'd be proud. Very proud indeed." She hopped into a demat-booth.

"What do you think?" I whispered to Emmanuel.

"Let's be patient," he said. Then, "Oh, look at all the darling babies!"

A seductive voice was saying, in warm, motherly tones, "Number 17 of our 'exotic' line is green-skinned, adapted for Deimos gravity, with a power-steering option for those difficult visits to high-gravity worlds. Choice of three hair colors and two basic personality indexes — 'passionate and profound' or 'excitable and extrovert'. Actual personality will depend, of course, on environmental factors and your own parental proclivities."

The baby spun round and toddled off in mid-air.

"Number 18. The two heads are perfectly adapted for . . ."

"Can't we turn this thing off?" I shouted impatiently. Doctor Varhite nudged me gently, and I saw that our friend Fred was gazing, spellbound, at the tot parade.

"Normal . . . normal . . ." he was murmuring, as a charming little number with vestigial wings, four arms and belly-gills drifted by. Poor Fred. I made sure I got a shot of his wistful face. I was in my element now, capturing the very essence of the man for the audience that was never to be. More and more the situation was getting urgent — anyone who'd envy an 'exotic' baby for being normal . . . they're usually intended for Babylon-5, and if you call anything to do with *that* colony normal, you really have flipped your chips.

Miss Perfect Mother came flouncing in with another matriarchal figure, this time in a golden diaper that radiated higher authority. This was Mabel Murray-Pentecost, regional manager of Storkways Inc. She too sported the infamous patent smile.

"Welcome!" she boomed. "I am most honored to be able to conduct you through our venerable halls myself, though I am sure that whatever is troubling that poor, poor young man will not be found here. And let me say for the benefit of the audience" — she certainly was making the best of her air time, not knowing that she'd never make it on to the holovee screen — "that Storkways is *dedicated* to the infinite recomplexification of our human gene pool. Why be the same when you can be different? I know it's conservative and old-fashioned of us, but let me say that I *believe* in those values. Here at Storkways Inc. we always say: 'A clone no more!'"

Having said her piece, she beckoned us into a booth.

"Fred has been tranquilized," Varhite was explaining to the Mother, "so that only the most primal of memories will precipitate his convulsions." Nevertheless, I noticed that Miss Murray-Pentecost was keeping her distance and even seemed a little leery of Clunko as he clambered after us.

" . . . and this is the viewing room," she was saying, "where the little dears all rest and where they can be examined by prospective parents through a

sophisticated audio-video-tacto-olfacto projection device in the privacy of their own holoview cubicles."

We were standing in a tremendously long hall lined with float-cribs, five in a row, with narrow lanes between the rows. The din was really heady; with some reluctance I resisted the cheap trick of switching up the audio track. I was damn well going to be artistic even if no one was going to experience this show.

"My god!" I exclaimed for the camera. "How many babies do you have here at any one time?"

"Three, four thousand," she said. "We change them every sleep shift."

"But... don't any ever get misplaced?" said Doctor Varhite slyly.

"What, sir? Incompetence here at Storkways Inc.? You ask the impossible. Are we not *dedicated* to the preservation of human life? Are we not a byword for ethical behavior throughout the solar system?"

"All right, already!" I said. "Varhite — any luck on the patient?"

Fred was stalking up and down the aisles. He seemed a little restless, with his cloak flying behind him and his hands trembling a bit, but benign enough for now. Every now and then he stopped to croon over one of the babies.

"He won't... you know, *eat* one?" asked Mabel Murray-Pentecost anxiously.

"Oh, no. His 'attacks' come every six hours exactly, and he's just been fed," said Doctor Varhite.

"Curious," said the matriarch. "We've just had our feeding too — we run the feeding system every six hours, and it's all computer controlled, obviously..."

Doctor Varhite and I exchanged a quick look. "It's probably fortuitous," I said. "It seems a pretty unlikely connection to me..."

I subvoked Clunko and told him to heel. We had a lot more to squeeze into my last day and I was getting impatient. We weren't going to find a solution anyway... Clunko had been having a grand time snapping all the babies — his 'human interest' programming was very deeply ingrained. I had to squeeze to negotiate the aisles, and the manageress' fixed smile had become extremely wearying to look at. The hall was not designed for people, but for robots; and the nearest demat booth was a good five hundred meters of squashing and squeezing away.

The next hall was a very murky one. It was two meters across but seemed to stretch forever. The walls were high — about twenty-five meters — and lined with shelves. On each shelf squatted a row of bored-looking chimpanzees, each with a baby in its arms.

"A-ha!" said Emmanuel. I saw his point. Now I was sure there was a connection, but what was it? I glanced at Fred, who was shaken but still in one piece — thanks to the massive dose of tranquilizers.

"This," said the guide, "is our feeding room, where our little ones are breast-fed by genetically altered chimpanzees, as you can see. It's ever so hygienic, and you know it's much better psychologically for the child to be able to relate to a living creature."

Now I knew that all the pieces belonged to the same puzzle. But I still couldn't see the answer. Nothing fell into place. What could possibly be traumatic about being breast-fed by a chimpanzee? The idea certainly didn't worry me, and I had been a regular baby.

But they gave me a creepy feeling, those rows and rows of apes, each clutching a baby in its arms, each with a dead, glazed look which betrayed... what? Genetic tampering? "What now?" I asked Doctor Varhite.

"Is there anything else?" He turned to Miss Murray-Pentecost.

"I don't think so — this represents all the stages that a baby would go

through. . ."

"And yet the patient has exhibited no unusual anxieties, yet." Fred had retreated into his cloak, but was still calm. "You've never discovered. . ." the doctor began to hem and haw, choosing his words with great care — "any instances of traumatization from these breast feedings?"

"Heavens, no, Doctor," she said with some revulsion, "our research department — not to mention our discriminating clientele — would never have let us get away with such a thing!"

"And the babies are placed with chimpanzee mother-surrogates immediately after parturition?" said Doctor Varhite.

"Well, yes, of course."

"And if no chimpanzees are available?" I said.

"Well, sometimes it happens, and then we take some of the older babies off the chimpanzee temporarily to make room. . . we have excellent temporary facilities, of course, for the temporarily displaced little ones. . ."

"Show me," Varhite said grimly.

"You don't ask for much, do you?" she said through her implacable smile. "Come with me." Her golden diaper gleamed in the half-light.

"I do apologize for our lack of dermat-booths here," she said, "but we usually only have robots here." A little passageway opened up at our feet, and she motioned us to descend. "We don't usually want any unnecessary infection, you know, and one can't very well put a prospective parent into an autoclave. . ." She chuckled heartily at her own joke.

The steep passageway was cramped; we had to go single file. Fred and the Doctor lagged; I think Fred was reluctant and had to be coaxed. A strange uneasiness hung in the air. The manageress and I were the first ones to enter the little room. There were perhaps ten circular tables, stacked with hardware.

"On peak seasons," she was saying, "we do sometimes use these."

She indicated one of the round machines on a table, from which half a dozen padded cribs jutted, in some of which babies lay, some gurgling, some asleep. A plastiflesh pacifier extended over the mouth of each infant, and was connected to a vat of milk under the table. Most of the berthlets were empty.

"Seems efficient enough," I said.

She beamed maternally. "It's usually only for a day or so, until a new shipment of fastclone chimps can be transmatted from the farms on Earth."

"What's this here?" I pointed to one of the unoccupied cribs, where the pacifier looked a little odd.

"Why," she said, "I've no idea."

. . . the plastiflesh had broken off, rotted away somehow, revealing the pointed steel of the milk-injector underneath, sharp and ugly. A baby could. . .

"Are you telling me. . ." I began.

"Oh, no, our equipment is inspected *daily*. That must be why the crib is unoccupied, you see." I thought I could detect a slight wilting of the permanent smile, even though I knew it was anatomically impossible.

"But isn't it just possible that, if you had a defective pacifier, that a baby could accidentally get assigned to it *before* the daily inspection, and. . ."

Just then the others came down and crowded around the table. I was just pointing out the faulty pacifier when —

Fred gave a hysterical cry and began to pummel the machine with his fists. Doctor Varhite and I stepped back in shock. He was banging, now his fists were sore and bloody, he was yelling over and over, "Mommy, mommy, mommy, you betrayed me you hurt me you made me drink blood you gave me blood

mommy mommy mommy. . . .”

My blood was racing with excitement. I sent the camera flying every which way. Fred was beautiful. The way he clawed at the metal, the way he moaned and shrieked —

“Inspected daily?” I turned to the matriarch grimly.

“I assure you, sir. . . .” she said (without losing her smile for a moment) “your accusations are impossible! We’ll sue! We’ll sue!”

“Mommy mommy mommy. . . .”

How BIG a story could you get? Incompetence — in *Storkways Incorporated* — within the very bastions of everything we held good in society! I’d shot the show that would undermine the very foundations of our beliefs! A pity that no one would see it —

“I’ll sue, you can’t go exposing us like this, I can explain!” screamed the matriarch, smiling beatifically and grotesquely the whole time.

Above the tumult I turned to Emmanuel Varhite. “And now let’s talk to the expert himself,” I said in my suavest holovee voice. “Now that the pieces have come together, what are your conclusions?”

“Dark are the ways of the Unconscious,” he began dramatically. (The screaming in the background never stopped. It set the babies off, and *they* were all hollering their lungs out.) “The essence of Confrontation Therapy is truth, sheer truth. Here we have seen an unfortunate trauma: the patient was made to substitute pain and blood for a mother’s love and milk. No wonder he felt hostility towards the chimpanzee-mother-surrogate who came to late to aid him from his terrible torment! No wonder he could not forgive! Yes! It was in this very womb that the seeds of schizophrenia were sown. . . .”

“Mommy mommy mommy. . . .”

“I’ll sue. . . .”

“Waaaaaaagh. . . .”

Seizing the moment, I gathered up my most melodramatic phrases and stood in a heroic pose, full face in front of Clunko. Go, *Clunko*, go, I subvoked, and then began rhetorically: “What have we seen here, friends? We have traced this unfortunate, tragic man’s career back to its very roots. We have shown him the source of his terrible inner conflict; and now we have freed him to emerge, a fully *human* being, from the living hell that was his domain. Yes! What we have witnessed today — is Death and Rebirth! Total Catharsis! in a monumental, heart-warming victory for the human spirit!”

I spread out my arms in the famous “crucified” pose that has since made me a household word, held for ten seconds, and turned round to see if I could stop all the screaming.

“... SO YOU SEE,” Clement barJulian was saying to me, “I had to see the finished product. Federico was — is — my son.” He downed another glass of angels’ tears. “I should have believed that a cure was possible, and yet — and yet —”

“I know.” He had wept four times when they showed him the rough edit of the special. He’d rehired me. He’d re-adopted his son. I didn’t want to go into all that again — I was trying to ferret out some scandal about his sister-in-law. After a whole year in which I’d become rich, in which *Storkways* had paid damages through the nose — and hush-up money, too; when a dozen other cases of criminal negligence came to light, and Vampire imitators popped up all over Sol System, and glamorous Fred being chased everywhere by an army of amorous groupies, begging for a gentle nip on the neck in memory of the old days —

Yes. Things certainly turned out right for him. And yet —
“Clement,” I said, “I don’t like what I do anymore.”

He hardly looked up from his main course, a succulent crablike purple thing with splotchy tentacles swimming in a bowl of strawberry jello. I looked away, watching the stars wheel. “Eh?”

“I’m a phony, you know,” I said. After a whole year I had to blurt out my heart to someone. “All holovee personalities are. We’re really drab. And yet, when I think of when I first watched Fred’s show, and saw love and death and beauty and mystery all mingled together, and I knew that this was *Art* . . . nothing I do will ever be as beautiful, or as terrifying, or as *real*, as Fred the Vampire’s lunacy. Will it?”

“He was crazy!” Clement said. “You cured him, and earned a few creds yourself from the whole thing. You should be happy.”

“But I’m scared. I’m scared. I feel like I’ve destroyed . . . something very personal, something like a soul I suppose. I almost regret it. . . .”

“Come on!” Clement roared. “Here, take your mind off it, let me tell you some juicy gossip —”

I could not bring myself to confess to Clement barJulian that, for a few moments, when his son the Vampire squeezed the life out of a particularly beautiful woman in a passion beyond ecstasy and terror, I would have given anything to feel what he felt . . . for a few seconds that will haunt me forever, I had envied the Vampire of Mallworld. ●

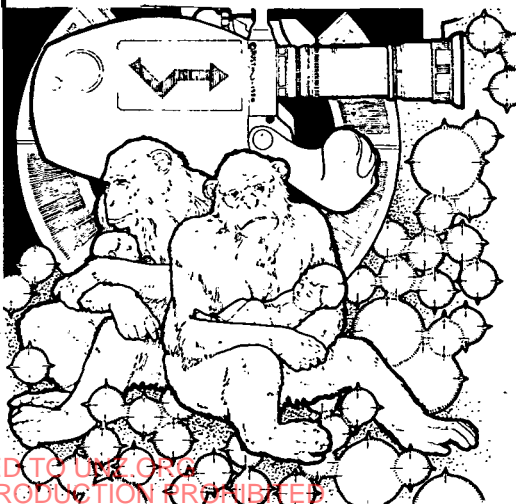
Somtow Sucharitkul

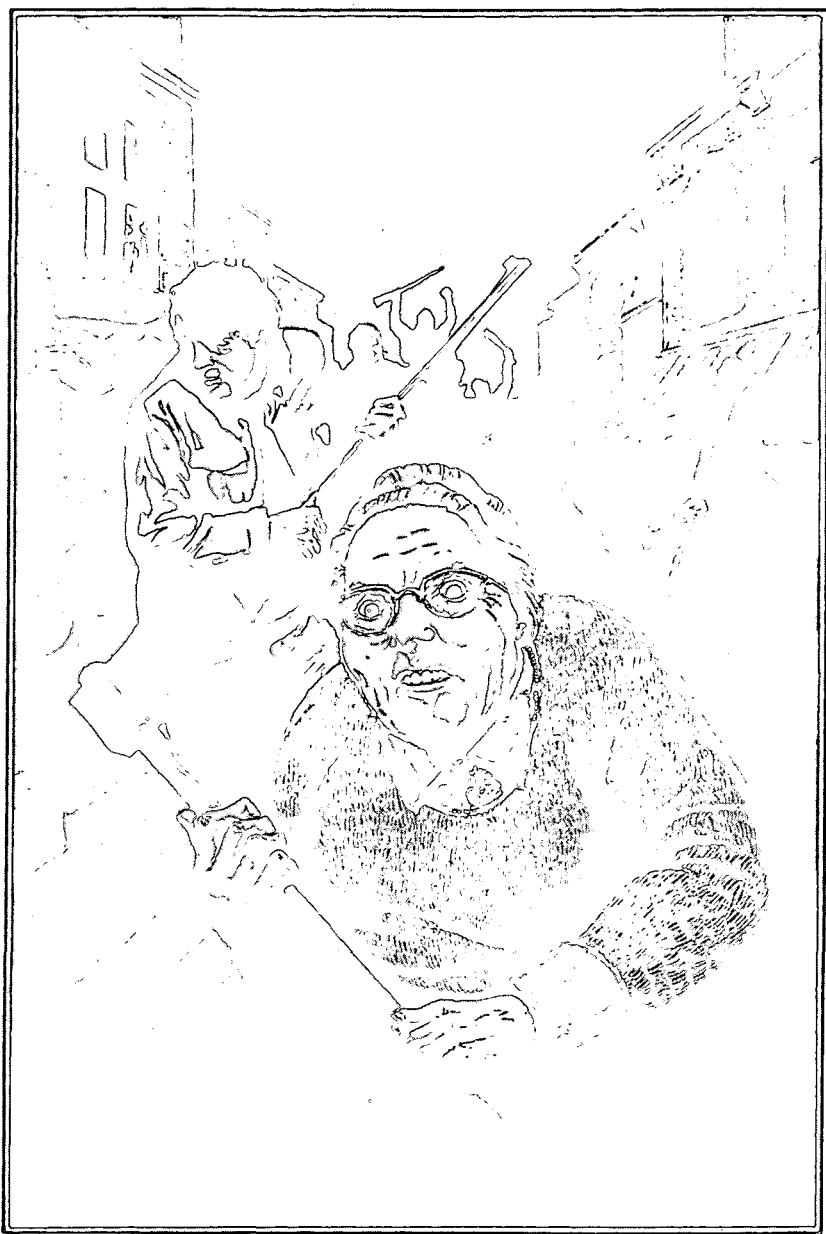
In “real” life, Somtow Sucharitkul is an avant-garde composer, who commutes back and forth between Bangkok, Thailand and Washington DC (with various stops in between) in pursuit of his musical career. Among his recent works are *Gongula 3* for Thai and Western Instruments, *Star Maker* (an orchestral work in which each movement is based on a different theory of the universe), and *A Catch of Waters* for six (small) orchestras. He has been the subject of a Japanese TV documentary and has fallen into a septic tank.

Somtow began to write SF about three years ago, trying to get out of a (musical) writing block. To his surprise, he began to sell some stories: first to *Analog*, and then followed by *Asimov’s SF Magazine*, *Chrysalis*, *Galaxy* and others. He was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer at the 1980 World SF Convention. His first novel (tentatively titled *The Starship and The Haiku*) is coming out from Pocket Books late in

1981; Starblaze Books will be doing, for Christmas 1981, a collection of his popular *Mallworld* stories, illustrated by Karl Kofoed. He is working on a trilogy now, of which tantalizing portions have been appearing in *Asimov’s SF Magazine*. The Philadelphia Inquirer says that Somtow has “wild imagination and colorful command of language”

In his spare time, Somtow rides roller coasters a lot. He is 27 and a Capricorn.





Illustrated by Stephen Fabian

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the Amazing Hall of Fame

presents:

Gregory Benford's

NOBODY LIVES ON BURTON STREET

Amazing Stories has been around since 1926. That's a lot of years. . . years during which hundreds of stories penned by writers unknown then and hailed today expanded the imaginative horizons of that special breed of bookworm, the science fiction fan. Issues from the first several decades represent a treasure trove of early Silverberg, Ellison, Bunch, Leiber, Bradbury, Asimov, del Rey, Bova, Bloch, Sheckley, Williamson. . . to name just a few. To leave such a wealth of material

buried in the background seems unconscionable, so we have been contacting these authors and asking them to reintroduce their stories from the pages of Amazing/Fantastic past for the readers of Amazing/Fantastic today. Also, for writers of Amazing/Fantastic today, who now have the same opportunity as Hall of Famers, herewith a hoard of nostalgic inspiration. Here is a story from the rebellious 60s by one of Amazing's most popular contributors, Gregory Benford.

A Note on "Nobody Lives on Burton Street"

By 1969 I had been writing science fiction short stories for five years. I started this troublesome habit as a recreation, while I was a graduate student in physics at the University of California at San Diego. It was a pleasant distraction and I even made a little money at it. My first published story placed second in the *Fantasy & Science Fiction* contest of 1965, but I had no great ambitions.

Then Ted White became editor of *Amazing Stories*. Ted and I had coedited a rather well known SF fan publication (a "fanzine") called *Void*, back in the early 1960s. Ted had been writing SF while I finished my doctorate in plasma physics and went on to become a theoretical physicist working on fusion control at the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory. Sometime in (I think) 1966 I wrote the story you see here; but I couldn't sell it. None of the magazines or anthologies would take the thing. I had been thinking about the problem of urban violence ever since I watched the black community of Watts burn itself into despair in 1964. I remember standing on the beach in La Jolla and watching the orange glow of Watts on the horizon, a full 100 miles away. In the '60s urban violence looked like an inevitable consequence of the rising expectations of blacks and others. How to handle it? Oppression? That seemed inefficient.

The problem of violence in society is an age-old one, and the most common solutions have been sublimation and/or deflection onto another target. I wrote "Nobody Lives on Burton Street" while I was trying to envision window-smashing and joyful pyrotechnics as a controlled, ultimately productive process. I thought about other side effects of our inability to deal with our social issues, and wrote stories about the black revolution turning radical-Marxist, etc.

None of these sold. Not a one. In part it was because they were not particularly well done. I took a long time to learn how to construct decent, interesting plots, much less add the icing of character, style, implication, etc. Still, my then-agent, Henry Morrison, thought one of my late-'60s stories was worth trying on all the mainstream magazines because it had some impact. He failed to place it there or even with an SF magazine. I'm pretty con-

vinced that most of this string of failures (about three stories in a row) was because of inept writing. But some of it was in the subject matter, which many found unpleasant. The fact that today we are still largely unable to deal with the desperate revolutions at home and abroad (Central America, Iran... it's a long list) implies that we still have some thinking to do.

So along came Ted White. I was busy with physics but Ted told me he was looking for fresh material and would even like me to write a science-in-SF column for *Amazing*. I didn't mind much that he paid low rates; I was comfortably off, from physics research.

I sent Ted several stories from the bottom of my trunk and he bought them. My first publication in *Amazing* was not one of these, though. Ted asked me to write a story around a cover painting he had — a gawdawful monstrosity — and I did, using themes I would later refine greatly into what I think is my next-to-best novel, *In the Ocean of Night*.

But I pick "Nobody Lives on Burton Street" because as I remember it, Ted bought it first and indeed I wrote it first. (Years before publication, in fact.) Looking it over now, I think it is a pretty decent piece of journeyman prose, using ideas that seemed damned original to me at the time. But I see the hand of many 1950s *Galaxy* yarns of social manipulation in the story now, and I cannot claim much insight for the piece. I never read much of the *Galaxy* line, but I must have picked up some of the ideas indirectly.

Most reviewers of that May 1970 issue agreed. It was dismissed as competent but not inspired. Me? I was happy to see it in print, and expected nothing more. By that time I was busy with other projects. I had begun to think more earnestly about writing SF and was beginning what I think is my best novel, *Timescape*, which took more than a decade to complete.

So imagine my surprise when Terry Carr and Don Wollheim picked it up for the *Best SF*, 1971 anthology from Ace Books. Terry told me he thought it was compact, incisive, and thought-provoking. All well and good. Then imagine my surprise over the intervening decade when, every year or so, someone would send me a contract for yet another anthology right. It has been reprinted in text-aids about sociology, books about the implications of computers, anthologies on future professions, and

even a French volume on the future of the city.

Indeed, I believe this story is my most often anthologized work. Why? Because it neatly encapsulates a clear point. It has no literary grace to speak of, but so what? I am convinced that most of the SF audience wants ideas first, plot second, and everything else a distant speck on the horizon.

Maybe this is the way it should be, too, for the audience — which is mostly young, mostly intellectual, and mostly traveling the terrain of SF for the first time.

I have changed my sense of what is good in an SF work rather a lot, since 1969. I am now interested in writing books which are novels first, and SF second — meaning that I like a balanced whole in a work, not simply a catchy idea to remember.

But I still enjoy at times writing a mostly-idea yarn. ("Time Shards," in the 1980 Carr *Best Of* anthology, for example.) You run risks with ideas, too, of course — they can go out of style as easily as anything else. A feminist critic recently castigated "Nobody Lives on Burton Street" for "sexist stereotypes," citing even such detailed character types as "murderous, grandmother" in the story. I must say I find all this kind of thing rather more amusing than illuminating, but it does show how stories can carry freight we did not suspect.

As I said, the political implications of this story seem still rather important. I hope it will stir up some thought, in this most recent incarnation.

— Gregory Benford, September, 1980
Laguna Beach

I was standing by one of our temporary command posts, picking my teeth after breakfast and talking to Joe Murphy when the first part of the Domestic Disturbance hit us.

Spring had lost its bloom a month back and it was summer now — hot, sticky, the kind of weather that leaves you with a half-moon of sweat around your armpits before you've had time to finish your morning coffee. A summer like that is always more trouble. This one looked like the worst I'd seen since I got on the Force.

We knew they were in the area, working toward us. Our communications link had been humming for the last half hour, getting fixes on their direction and asking the computers for advice on how to handle them when they got here.

I looked down. At the end of the street were a lot of semi-permanent shops and the mailbox. The mailbox bothers me — it shouldn't be there.

From the other end of Burton Street I could hear the random dull bass of the mob.

So while we were getting ready Joe was moaning about the payments on the Snocar he'd been suckered into. I was listening with one ear to him and the other to the crowd noise.

"And it's not just that," Joe said. "It's the neighborhood and the school and everybody around me."

"Everybody's wrong but Murphy, huh?" I said, and grinned.

"Hell no, you know me better than that. It's just that nobody's going anywhere. Sure, we've all got jobs, but they're most of them just make-work stuff the unions have gotten away with."

"To get a real job you gotta have training," I said, but I wasn't chuffing him up. I like my job, and it's better than most, but we weren't gonna kid each other that it was some big technical deal. Joe and I are just regular guys.

"What're you griping about this now for, anyway?" I said. "You didn't used to be bothered by anything."

Joe shrugged. "I dunno. Wife's been getting after me to move out of the place we're in and make more money. Gets into fights with the neighbors." He looked a little sheepish about it.

"More money? Hell, y'got everything you need, we all do. Lot of people worse off than you. Look at all those lousy Africans, living on nothing."

I was going to say more, maybe rib him about how he's married and I'm not, but then I stopped. Like I said, all this time I was half-listening to the crowd. I can always tell when a bunch has changed its direction like a pack of wolves off on a chase, and when that funny quiet came and lasted about five seconds I knew they were heading our way.

"Scott!" I yelled at our communications man. "Close it down. Get a final print-out."

Murphy broke off telling me about his troubles and listened to the crowd for a minute, like he hadn't heard them before, and then took off on a trot to the An-Cops we had stashed in the truck below. They were all warmed up and ready to go, but Joe likes to make a final check and maybe have a chance to read in any new instructions Scott gets at the last minute.

I threw away the toothpick and had a last look at my constant-volume joints, to be sure the bulletproof plastiform was matching properly and wouldn't let anything through. Scott came doubletiming over with the diagnostics from HQ. The computer compilation was neat and confusing, like it always is. I could make out the rough indices they'd picked up on the crowd heading our way. The best guess — and that's all you ever get, friends, is a guess — was a lot of Psych Disorders and Race Prejudice. There was a fairly high number of Unemployed, too. We're getting more and more Unemployed in the city now, and they're hard for the Force to deal with. Usually mad enough to spit. Smash up everything.

I penciled an ok in the margin and tossed it Scott's way. I'd taken too long reading it; I could hear individual shouts now and the tinkling of glass. I flipped the visor down from my helmet and turned on my external audio. It was going to get hot as hell in there, but I'm not chump enough to drag around an air conditioning unit on top of the rest of my stuff.

I took a look at the street just as a gang of about a hundred people came around the corner two blocks down, spreading out like a dirty gray wave. I ducked over to the edge of the building and waved to Murphy to start off with three AnCops. I had to hold up three fingers for him to see because the noise was already getting high. I looked at my watch. Hell, it wasn't nine a.m. yet.

Scott went down the stairs we'd tracted up the side of the building. I was right behind him. It wasn't a good location for observation now; you made too good a target up there. We picked up Murphy, who was carrying our control boards. All three of us angled down the alley and dropped down behind a short fence to have a look at the street.

Most of them were still screaming at the top of their lungs like they'd never run out of air, waving whatever they had handy and gradually breaking up into smaller units. The faster ones had made it to the first few buildings.

A tall Negro came trotting toward us, moving like he had all the time in the world. He stopped in front of a wooden barber shop, tossed something quickly through the front window and *whump!* Flames licked out at the upper edges of the window, spreading fast.

An older man picked up some rocks and began methodically pitching them through the smaller windows in the shops next door. A housewife clumped by awkwardly in high heels, looking like she was out on a shopping trip except for the hammer she swung like a pocket book. She dodged into the barbership for a second, didn't find anything and came out. The Negro grinned and pointed at the barber pole on the sidewalk, still revolving, and she caught it in the side with a swipe that threw shattered glass for ten yards.

I turned and looked at Murphy. "All ready?"

He nodded. "Just give the word."

The travel agency next door to the barber shop was concrete-based, so they couldn't burn that. Five men were lunging at the door and on the third try they knocked it in. A moment later a big travel poster sailed out the front window, followed by a chair leg. They were probably doing as much as they could, but without tools, they couldn't take much of the furniture apart.

"Okay," I said. "Let's have the first AnCops."

The thick acrid smell from the smoke was drifting down Burton Street to us, but my air filters would take care of most of it. They don't do much about human sweat, though, and I was going to be inside the rest of the day.

Our first prowler car rounded the next corner, going too fast. I looked over at Murphy, who was controlling the car, but he was too busy trying to miss the people who were standing around in the street. Must have gotten a little overanxious on that one. Something was bothering his work.

I thought sure the car was going to take a tumble and mess us up, but the wheels caught and it rightened itself long enough for the driver to stop a skid. The screech turned the heads of almost everybody in the crowd and they'd started to move in on it almost before the car stopped laying down rubber and came to a full stop. Murphy punched in another instruction and the AnCop next to the driver started firing at a guy on the sidewalk who was trying to light a Molotov cocktail. The AnCop was using something that sounded like a repeating shotgun. The guy with the cocktail just turned around and looked at him a second before scurrying off into a hardware store.

By this time the car was getting everything — bricks, broken pieces of furniture, merchandise from the stores. Something heavy shattered the windshield and the driver ducked back too late to avoid getting his left hand smashed with a bottle. A figure appeared on the top of the hardware shop — it looked like the guy from the sidewalk — and took a long windup before throwing something into the street.

There was a tinkling of glass and a red circle of flame slid across the pavement where it hit just in front of the car, sending smoke curling up over the hood and obscuring the inside. Murphy was going to have to play it by feel now; you couldn't see a thing in the car.

A teenager with a stubby rifle stepped out of a doorway, crouched down low like in a western. He fired twice, very accurately and very fast, at the window of the car. A patrolman was halfway out the door when it hit him full in the face, sprawling the body back over the roof and then pitching it forward into the street.

A red blotch formed around his head, grew rapidly and ran into the gutter. There was ragged cheering and the teenager ran over to the body, tore off its badge and backed away. "Souvenir!" he called out, and a few of the others laughed.

I looked at Murphy again and he looked at me and I gave him the nod for the firemen, switching control over to my board. Scott was busy talking into his recorder, taking notes for the writeup later. When Murphy nudged him he stopped and punched in the link for radio control to the firefighting units.

By this time most of Burton Street was on fire. Everything you saw had a kind of orange look to it. The crowd was moving toward us once they'd lost interest in the cops, but we'd planned it that way. The firemen came running out in that jerky way they have, just a little in front of us. They were carrying just a regular hose this time because it was a medium-sized group and we couldn't use up a fire engine and all the extras. But they were wearing the usual red uniforms. From a distance you can't tell them from the real thing.

Their subroutine tapes were fouled up again. Instead of heading for the barber shop or any of the other stuff that was burning, like I'd programmed, they turned the hose on a stationery store that nobody had touched yet. There were three of them, holding onto that hose and getting it set up. The crowd had backed off a minute to see what was going on.

When the water came through it knocked in the front window of the store, making the firemen look like real chumps. I could hear the water running around inside, pushing over things and flooding out the building. The crowd laughed, what there was of it. I noticed some of them had moved off in the other direction, over into somebody else's area.

In a minute or so the laughing stopped, though. One guy who looked like he had been born mad grabbed an ax from somewhere and took a swing at the hose. He didn't get it the first time but people were sticking around to see what would happen and I guess he felt some kind of obligation to go through with it. Even under pressure, a thick hose isn't easy to cut into. He kept at it and on the fourth try a seam split — looked like a bad repair job to me — and a stream of water gushed out and almost hit this guy in the face.

The crowd laughed at that too, because he backed off real quick then, scared for a little bit. A face full of high-velocity water is no joke, not at that pressure.

The fireman who was holding the hose just a little down from there hadn't paid any attention to this because he wasn't programmed to, so when this guy thought about it he just stepped over and chopped the fireman across the back with the ax.

It was getting hot. I didn't feel like overriding the stock program, so it wasn't long before all the firemen were out of commission, just about the same way. A little old lady — probably with a welfare gripe — borrowed the ax for a minute to separate all of a fireman's arms and legs from the trunk. Looking satisfied, she waddled away after the rest of the mob.

I stood up, lifted my faceplate and looked at them as they milled back down the street. I took out my grenade launcher and got off a tear gas cartridge on low charge, to hurry them along. The wind was going crosswise so the gas got carried off to the side and down the alleys. Good; wouldn't have complaints from somebody who got caught in it too long.

Scott was busy sending orders for the afternoon shift to get more replacement fireman and cops, but we wouldn't have any trouble getting them in time. There hadn't been much damage, when you think how much they could've done.

"Okay for the reclaim crew?" Murphy said.

"Sure. This bunch won't be back. They look tired out already." They were moving toward Horton's area, three blocks over.

A truck pulled out of the alley and two guys in coveralls jumped out and began picking up the androids, dousing fires as they went. In an hour they'd have everything back in place, even the prefab barber shop.

"Helluva note," Murphy said.

"Huh?"

"All this stuff," he waved a hand down Burton Street. "Seems like a waste to hold all this just so these jerks can tear it up again."

"Waste?" I said. "It's the best investment you ever saw. How many people were in the last bunch — two hundred? Every one of them is going to sit around for weeks bragging about how he got him a cop or burned a building."

"Okay, okay. If it does any good, I guess it's cheap at twice the price."

"If, hell! You know it does. If it didn't they wouldn't be here. You got to be cleared by a psyker before you even get in. The computer works out just what

you'll need, just the kind of action that'll work off the agressions you've got. Then shoots it to us in the profile from HQ before we start. It's foolproof."

"I dunno. You know what the Consies say — the psychers and the probes and drugs are an in . . ."

"Invasion of privacy?"

"Yeah," Murphy said sullenly.

"Privacy? Man, the psychers are public health! It's part of the welfare! You don't have to go around to some expensive guy who'll have you lay on a couch and talk to him. You can get better stuff right from the government. It's free!"

Murphy looked at me kind of funny. "Sure. Have to go in for a checkup sometime soon. Maybe that's what I need."

I frowned just the right amount. "Well, I dunno, Joe. Man lets his troubles get him down every once in a while, doesn't mean he needs professional help. Don't let it bother you. Forget it."

Joe was okay, but even a guy like me who's never been married could tell he wasn't thinking up this stuff himself. His woman was pushing him. Not satisfied with what she had.

Now, *that* was wrong. Guy like Joe doesn't have anywhere to go. Doesn't know computers, automation. Can't get a career rating in the Army. So the pressure was backing up on him.

Supers like me are supposed to check out their people and leave it at that, and I go by the book like everybody else. But Joe wasn't the problem.

I made a mental note to have a psyker look at his wife.

"Okay," he said, taking off his helmet. "I got to go set up the AnCops for the next one."

I watched him walk off down the alley. He was a good man. Hate to lose him.

I started back toward our permanent operations center to check in. After a minute I decided maybe I'd better put Joe's name in too, just in case. Didn't want anybody blowing up on me.

He'd be happier, work better. I've sure felt a lot better since I had it. It's a good job I got, working in public affairs like this, keeping people straight with themselves.

I went around the corner at the end of the street, thinking about getting something to drink, and noticed the mailbox. I check on it every time because it sure looks like a mistake.

Everything's supposed to be pretty realistic on Burton Street, but putting in a mailbox seems like a goofy idea.

Who's going to try to burn up a box like that, made out of cast iron and bolted down? A guy couldn't take out any aggressions on it.

And it sure can't be for real use. Not on Burton Street.

Nobody lives around here. ●

Gregory Benford

Gregory Benford is Professor of Physics at the University of California, Irvine. He received his Ph.D in theoretical physics from the University of California, San Diego in 1967. He has published over fifty scientific papers and has been a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. He was a visiting Fellow at Cambridge University, England in 1976

and 1979. His research interests include solid state physics, plasma physics and high energy astrophysics. His astronomical research centers on the dynamics of pulsars, violent extragalactic events and quasars. He writes the entry on General Developments in Physics for the Encyclopedia Britannica. He has also publish-

ed numerous articles in *Natural History*, *Smithsonian*, *New Scientist* and other major periodicals. His fiction includes several dozen short stories and four novels, *Jupiter Project* (1975), *If The Stars Are Gods* (1977), *In the Ocean of Night* (1977), *The Stars in Shroud* (1978), and *Timescape* (1980). In 1975 he received the Nebula Award of the Science Fiction Writers of America for short fiction. His stories have been published frequently in anthologies of the best short fiction of the year, and his novels have been translated into six foreign languages. He lives in Laguna Beach, California.

Benford's association with *Amazing Stories* began under the editorship of Ted White, with whom he had published the Hugo-contending fanzine, *Void*. From 1969 to 1979 he wrote the occasional column, "The Science in Science Fiction," often in collaboration with David Book, who is now a Senior Research Physicist at the Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, D.C. Benford's novel, *Jupiter Project*, was first serialized in *Amazing* and then was

rewritten for hard cover publication by Thomas Nelson in 1976. Since the recent Pioneer missions to Jupiter the novel has been again rewritten, including new science and incorporating our better understanding of Jupiter directly into the plot. It will appear in paperback from Berkley Publishers in late 1980. The seeds of *In the Ocean of Night*, widely regarded as one of the finest novels of the 1970s, were sown in a novelette in *Amazing*, "Sons of Man." A column in *Amazing* on astronomical disasters led to *Shiva Descending*, Benford's recent bestselling collaboration with William Rotsler, published with mass market promotion by Avon. Another "Science in SF" column, on his own theoretical research into tachyons (faster-than-light particles), became the basis of Benford's *Timescape*, a novel which appeared in 1980 from Simon & Schuster and which is being hailed as a milestone in the history of modern science fiction writing. ●

Thing in the Night Mist

Down Fearing Street halfway I picked Thing up
and we went on so spectrally from there
that all seemed weird and spell-caught. Cold moon glow
on damp sky
conspired with phantoms, till a wan half-face
whirled in the fog, then fell back. But strange Thing
held in near,
so close indeed that I could glance around
and see it at my side, or stealing up from back,
or sometimes spread just above me. There was no sound
except swift clacks on concrete, one-two-one
and two again and on in a crisp, treading
geared to a scared runner's wild arm swings. We
swept on down
in ever-increasing tempo and eyes were search beams
asking the closed night to pass us, as strange Thing and I
held tight.
Our scurrying course sought Home, and we kept at it
till Fearing Street hit lights and noise on Grand,
lessening our chaos. Tired, we legged on down
to the Wishing Well Motel to night-bell the night clerk.
One vacant bed was all that he spared for one who had seemed
shared-by-specter;
I went inside, dreamed I had died, but NO—
I must wake to that Dread even LARGER. . .

—David R. Bunch

ENCOUNTER

Hank Stine

First he heard a ringing. Then a white misty glow filled the night. He looked up out of the eyes of the hood through the stark, bare forest branches and tried to see what it might be.

A plane perhaps or a helicopter, although what either would be doing out here he could not imagine, and something would have to be wrong with the engine for it to sound like that.

The ringing became a high, clear pulsation.

Then he saw the girl. He had kept looking right along and she materialized out of thin air above him as if taking on her substance from the foggy mists in which she hung.

Then while he was still stunned and before he could believe his own senses, she began to descend amid the crystal ringing of the night.

"I bring you a message of peace."

She spoke from the air, as if she could not contain the greeting until her feet touched the ground.

And then she was down, and she stood before him in all her loveliness, sweeter than any woman he had ever seen.

"We come to teach you to live in harmony. We come to end your hatred and divisiveness. We have come to show you that there is no difference between individuals of whatever race or background. We have come to give you the gift of brotherhood. We can open up your hearts to each other so that all may learn their neighbor's thoughts and feelings are the same as their own. For shape, size, color and form do not matter. The same spirit is in all. When our powers have demonstrated this, what you have been will fall away and your people will mingle in love and fellowship, equals with one another and with the species of the stars."

When she had finished, he knew what he must do.

He pushed the long, peaked hood back off his head so that he could see better and lifted the shotgun out from beneath his white Imperial robes.

He pulled both triggers at once.

Then he continued on down the hill, toward the Klan meeting.

Hank Stine

Having pursued careers of film directing/editing, magazine editing, and writing, Stine is currently senior editor for Starblaze Books and consulting SF editor for Belmont/Tower Books. He edited the presently defunct *Galaxy* from Sept.

'78-Dec. '79. Writing credits include "The Prisoner #3; A Day in the Life" (a 1970 TV adaptation); *Season of the Witch* (a 1968 novel); and *Thrill City* (a 1969 novel). He is married to writer Janrae Frank.

She grew old in less than a minute. When she left the side of the Landsman of Thayos, Maris was still young. She took the underground way from his spare, rocky keep to the sea; a damp, gloomy tunnel through the side of the mountain. She walked quickly, with a taper in her hand and her folded wings upon her back, surrounded by echoes and the slow drip of water. The walk was unpleasant. There were puddles on the floor of the tunnel, and the water soaked through her boots. But it was the quickest way, and Maris was anxious to be off.

It was not until she emerged into the twilight on the far side of the mountain that Maris saw the sky. She did not like the look of it. It was a dim threatening purple, a violet so dark it was almost black; the color of a bad bruise, full of blood and pain. The wind was cold and unruly, and the sea seemed too quiet. Maris could taste the fury that was about to break, could see it in the clouds. She stood at the foot of the time-worn stone stairs that led up the sea cliff, and briefly she considered turning back, resting overnight at the lodge house and postponing her flight until dawn.

The thought of the long walk back through the tunnel dismayed her, however, and Maris took no joy in this place. Thayos seemed to her a dark and bitter land, and its Landsman had been rude, brutality barely-hidden beneath the civilities required between Landsman and flyer. The message he had given her to fly weighed heavily upon her mind. The words were angry, greedy, full of the threat of war, and Maris was eager to deliver and forget them, to free herself of the burden as quickly as she could.

So she extinguished her taper and

started up the stairs, climbing easily with long, impatient strides. There were lines on her face and grey in her hair, but Maris still moved like a young woman.

Where the steps opened onto a broad stone platform above the sea, Maris unfolded her tissue-metal wings.

Open, they stretched twenty feet from tip to tip. They caught the wind and tugged at her as she snapped the last struts into place. The purple gloom of the storm gave a dark cast to the silver metal, and the rays of the setting sun left red streaks of light upon them, like scars welling full of blood. Maris hurried. She wanted to get ahead of the storm, to use it for added speed. She tightened the straps around herself, checked the wings a final time, and wrapped her hands about the familiar grips. With two quick steps she flung herself from the cliff, as she had uncounted times before. The wind was her old and true lover. She folded herself into its embrace and flew.

Then it betrayed her.

Afterwards, she tried to find a clear sequence of events, but it always seemed that everything had happened at once.

She saw lightning on the horizon, a lingering three-pronged bolt in the eastern sky. Then the wind slackened and went soft on her, and she fell, and banked, and turned, searching for a stronger current until the storm hit her, brutally sudden as the crack of a whip. The wind came out of nowhere with terrible force, and as she struggled to ride with it, it changed direction. Then a second time, then a third. Rain stung her face, lightning blinded her, and there was a pounding in her ears.

The storm pushed her backwards, then head over heels, as if she were a toy. She had no more choice, no more chance, than

Lisa Tuttle & the George R.R. Martin Fall

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50 AMAZING/FANTASTIC

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Excerpted from the forthcoming novel, WINDHAVEN, a Spring 1981 release from Simon & Schuster. This portion of the book takes us through a crucial period in the life of Maris, a strong, vibrant woman whose life is flying.

Illustrated by Gary Freeman

a leaf in a gale. She was buffeted this way and that until she was sick and dizzy and aware that she was falling. There was a wrenching from behind, as if someone had seized her by the collar, and she looked over her shoulder and saw the mountain rushing at her, a sheer wall of slick wet stone. She tried to pull away, and managed only to turn herself in the fierce embrace of the wind. It was too late, too late. Her left wing brushed the rock, collapsed, and Maris fell sideways, screaming. Her left wing was limp, and though she tried to fly one-winged, she knew that it was useless, and she was blinded by the rain, the storm had her in its killing teeth, and with her last clear thought, Maris knew that this was her death.

The sea took her, and broke her, and spit her out again.

They found her late the next day, broken and unconscious, but alive, on a rocky beach three miles from Thayos' flyers' cliff.

When Maris woke, many days later, she was fifty years old.

SHE WAS seldom more than semi-conscious during the first week, and afterwards she remembered little of that time. There were strange voices, blurred movements, hands that touched her, moved her, made her drink. Pain, when she moved and when she did not, waking and sleeping. She slept most of the time, and her dreams were more real to her than anything else except the constant pain. She walked through long tunnels beneath the earth, walked until her legs ached horribly, but she never found the steps that would lead her out to the sky. She fell through still air endlessly, her strength and skill useless in a dead sky. She stood before hundreds in council and argued and begged, but her words were slurred and too soft, and none of the people there listened, but all argued and laughed among themselves, ignoring her. She was hot, terribly hot, and she could not move.

Someone had taken her wings from her, and tied her legs, and put heavy stones on her chest. She struggled to move, to speak. She didn't know where she was, but she knew she had to fly somewhere with a message. She couldn't remember the message, but it was urgent, she had to say it. She couldn't move, she couldn't speak, she didn't know if there were tears or rain on her cheeks. Someone wiped her face

and spoke and made her drink a thick, bitter liquid.

Gradually the dreams grew less frightening. She thought, or dreamed, about her childhood, and about long flights above the endless ocean in the wild, clean sky, and about the joyous parties with her fellow flyers on the Eyrie.

At some point Maris knew she was lying in a big bed. There was a hearth nearby which always had a blazing fire in it, and she was covered with heavy layers of furs and blankets. She was hot, terribly hot, and she struggled to push off the blankets but could not.

There seemed to be people in the room, coming and going. She recognized some of them — they were her friends — but although she asked them to remove the blankets, they never did. They didn't seem to hear her, but they would often sit at the foot of the bed and talk to her. They spoke of things gone by as if they were present still, which confused her, but everything was confused, and she was glad to have her friends with her.

Coll came, singing his songs, and Barrion was with him, Barrion of the quick grin and the deep, rumbling voice. Old, crippled Sena, who had been teacher at Woodwings Academy, sat on the edge of the bed and said nothing. Raven appeared once, dressed all in black and looking so bold and beautiful that her heart ached with unspoken love for him all over again. Garth brought her steaming hot *kivas*, then told her jokes so that she laughed and forgot to drink. Val One-Wing stood in the doorway, watching, cold-faced as ever. S'Rella, her dear friend, came often, speaking of old times. Lovers she had never thought to see again appeared before her to speak, to comfort, to plead, to accuse, and then vanished, leaving all her questions unanswered. There was chubby blond T'mar, bringing her gifts he'd carved from stone, and Halland the singer, strong, black-bearded, looking just as he had when they had lived together on Lesser Amberly. She remembered then that he had been lost at sea, and she wept, her tears blotting out the sight of him. Young Reid, Landsman of Poweet, pleaded with her to come and live with him. She tried to explain that she could not move, but that if he would help her, if he would only remove these binding, heavy blankets, perhaps she could sit up. But Reid gave no sign that he heard her.

There were tears on his soft cheeks, and his arms were outstretched, pleading, as she had seen him so long ago. Jeff was there, too, hating her now, his love forgotten; hating her because, for all her help, he had been unable to win a pair of wings and join her in the sky. And Dorrel. Dorrel, her first love, came often.

Sometimes he was young, a handsome boy, and at other times he seemed much older. Maris found it hard to remember how old she was herself.

There was another visitor, a man strange to Maris. And yet he was not a stranger: she knew the touch of his gentle, sure hands, and the sound of his almost musical voice speaking her name. Unlike her other visitors, he came close to her and held up her head and fed her hot milky soups and spice tea and a thick, bitter potion that made her sleep. She could not place him in her life, or think how or when she had met him, but she felt glad to see him. He was an old man, thin and small but sinewy. Pale skin was stretched taut over the bones and planes of his face, and freckled with age. Fine white hair grew well back from a high forehead. His eyes, beneath prominent brows and in a webwork of tiny wrinkles, were brilliantly blue. But although he came so often, and knew her, Maris could not bring his name to mind.

Once, as he stood beside her and watched her, Maris struggled out of her half-sleep and told him how hot it was, and asked him to take away the blankets.

He shook his head. "You're feverish," he said. "The room is chilly, and you are very sick. You need the warmth of the blankets."

Startled by this phantom who had finally answered her, Maris struggled to sit up and get a better look at him. Her body responded sluggishly, and a sickening pain seared her left side. She moaned and went limp:

"Easy," said the man. His cool fingers were on her brow. "Your bones must knit before you can move. Here, drink this." He lifted her head and pressed the smooth, thick rim of a cup to her lips. She tasted bitterness, recognized the sleeping draught, swallowed obediently. The tension and pain drained out of her as her head sank back on the pillow.

"Sleep and don't worry," said the man.

He's real, thought Maris. Not like her other visitors. With difficulty she managed to speak: "Who... you?"

"My name is Evan," he said. "I'm a

healer. You've been in my care for weeks now. You are healing, but you are still very weak. You must sleep now, and conserve your strength."

"Healer." The word frightened her. She must be terribly sick, horribly injured, to spend weeks in the house of a healer. "Wh... where?"

He put his strong, thin fingers against her mouth to hush her. "On Thayos. No more questions now. I'll tell you everything later, when you are stronger. Now sleep. Let your body heal itself."

Maris stopped fighting the coming sleep. She would not think about why she was being tended by a healer — she would not worry, just now. He had said she was mending and must conserve her strength. She would believe him. She wished only, as she sank into sleep, that she would not dream again about that brief, terrible flight through the storm, and the awful crushing of her body.

HOURS OR days later, she awoke. The world was dark, with only dim embers alive in the hearth to give shape to the shadows. She saw no one, but as soon as she stirred, Evan was there. He prodded the fire into new life, felt her brow, and then sat lightly on the bed.

"You feel better now," he said. "The fever has broken, but you are not well yet. I know you want to move — it will be hard to keep still. But you must. You are still very weak, and your body will mend better if you do not tax it. If you cannot keep still by yourself I must give you more *tesis*."

"*Tesis*?" Her own voice sounded strange in her ears. She coughed, trying to clear her throat.

"The bitter drink that quiets the body and mind, brings sleep and a kind of paralysis to stop the pain. It's a very helpful drink, full of healing herbs, but too much of it can be a poison. I had to give you more than I liked to, to keep you still. Physical restraints were no good for you — you thrashed and struggled and strained to be free. You wouldn't let the broken parts of your body rest and heal. When you drank the *tesis* you fell into the quiet, healing, painless sleep you needed. But I don't want to give you any more. There will be pain, but I think you can bear it. If you cannot, then I will give you *tesis*. Do you understand me, Maris?"

She looked into his bright blue eyes. "Yes," she said. "I understand. I'll try to be

still. Remind me."

He smiled. It made his face suddenly young. "I'll remind you," he said. "You're accustomed to a life of activity, motion, always going and doing. But you can't go somewhere to get your strength back — you must wait for it, lying here, as patiently as you can."

Maris began to nod her head, checked it as she felt a dull, straining pain on her left side. "I've never been a patient person," she said.

"No, but I've heard that you are strong. Use that strength to be still."

"You must tell me the truth," Maris said. she watched his face, trying to read the answer there. The fear was returning; she felt it like a cold poison moving throughout her body. She longed for the strength to sit up, to check her arms and legs.

"I'll tell you what I know," said Evan. "I won't lie to you, Maris."

She felt the fear in her throat and could scarcely speak. The words came in a whisper. "How... how badly was I hurt?" She closed her eyes, afraid now to read his face.

"You were terribly battered, but you lived. Broken and bruised, but whole." He stroked her cheek and she opened her eyes. "Both your legs were broken in the fall, the left one in four places. I set them, and they seem to be mending well — not as quickly as they would if you were younger, but I think you will eventually walk without a limp again. Your left arm was very badly broken, with the shattered bone protruding through the flesh. It was dark and swollen with the little white worms that feed on all injured animals, and when I first saw it, I thought I would have to amputate. But I did not." He pressed his fingers against her lips and withdrew them — it was like a kiss. "I cleaned it and used the fireflower essence and other herbs, to see how much good they might do, and now it seems to be mending. You'll have stiffness there a long time, but I don't think there was any nerve damage. With time and exercise I think your left arm will become strong and useful again."

Maris smiled, weak with relief. "Only three broken limbs," she said. "An easy landing, after all."

But Evan did not return her smile. "That was not the whole of the damage. You broke two ribs when you fell, and you cracked your head on the rock. You were

unconscious for three days in my care — I didn't know if you would ever return."

"But I did," said Maris.

"Yes. And raved and ranted and dreamed aloud for days. There was no memory loss, certainly. I feel a bit embarrassed, to know so much about you, Maris of Lesser Amberly, when I am little more than a stranger to you."

Maris wondered if she should feel uncomfortable, but found that she didn't mind; it seemed right that he should know everything about her, know her mind and soul as he knew her body. "You don't feel like a stranger," she said.

"You were very worried about the message you were bound to deliver," Evan said. "You repeated it again and again, like a chant. But the Landsman was informed of your accident. By now he has sent the same message to the Landsman of Thrane by another flyer."

"Of course," Maris murmured. She felt a burden she had not even known she carried lifted from her.

"Such an urgent message," Evan said, his voice bitter. "It couldn't wait for better flying weather. It sent you out into the storm, to injury. It might have meant your death. The war hasn't come yet, but already they start, disregarding human lives."

His bitterness distressed her even more than his talk of war, which merely puzzled her. "Evan," she said gently, "the flyer chooses when to fly. The Landsmen have no power over us, war or no. It was my eagerness to leave your bleak little island which made me start out despite the weather."

"And now my bleak little island is your home for a time."

"How long?" she asked. "How long before I can fly again?"

He looked at her without replying.

Maris suddenly feared the worst. "My wings!" She struggled to rise.

Her broken body was slow to respond, and Evan was quick, with hands on her shoulders, pressing her down. "Be still!" His blue eyes blazed.

"I forgot," she whispered. "I'll be still." Her whole body throbbed painfully in response to the mild exertion. "Please... my wings?"

"I have them," he said. He shook his head. "Flyers. I should have known — I've healed other flyers. I should have hung

them over your bed so they would be the first thing you saw. The Landsman wanted to take them for repair, but I insisted on keeping them. I knew you would ask, and if you could not see them you might not believe — and might grieve so you'd never heal. I'll get them for you." He vanished into the next room. A few minutes later he returned, carrying her wings in his arms.

They were mangled and broken and did not fold properly. The metallic fabric of the wings themselves, cut from the vast starsail that had brought humanity to Windhaven, was virtually indestructible, but the supporting struts were ordinary metal, and Maris could see that several of them had shattered, while others were bent and twisted grotesquely. The bright silver was crusted with dirt and stained black in places. In Evan's uncertain grasp they seemed a hopeless ruin.

But Maris knew better. They were not lost to the sea. They could be made whole again. Her heart soared to see them. They meant life to her; they meant she would fly again.

"Thank you," she said to Evan. She tried not to weep.

Evan hung the wings on the wall beyond the foot of the bed, where Maris could see them whenever she liked. Then he turned to her.

"It will be longer and harder to repair your body," he said. "Much longer than you will like. It won't be a matter of weeks, you understand, but of months, many months. And even then I can't promise you anything. Your bones were shattered, and the muscles torn — you aren't likely, at your age, to regain all the strength you once had. You'll walk again, but as for flying. . ."

"I will fly. My legs and my ribs and my arm will mend," Maris said quietly.

"Yes, given time, I think they will mend. But that may not be enough." He came close to the bed, and she saw the concern in his face. "The head injury — it may have affected your vision, or your sense of balance, or something else. Something may go wrong with the healing of your arm, and . . ."

"Stop it," Maris said. "Please." Tears leaked from her eyes.

"It's too soon," Evan said. "I'm sorry. You fool yourself and you even fool me, with your strength." He stroked her cheeks, wiping away the tears. "You need rest and hope, not worry. You need time to grow

strong again. You'll put on your wings again, but not before you are really ready — not before I say you are ready — understand?"

"A land-bound healer — telling a flyer when to fly," Maris muttered with a mock scowl.

Evan nodded approval. "Now," he said. "Do you feel well enough to manage some real food?"

Food. Maris realized that she was consumed with hunger. "Oh, yes," she said.

The "real food" wasn't much — a small bowl of watery stew, without meat or fish, offering only mushy, unidentifiable vegetables in a thin broth tasting chiefly of a mild, succulent sea-weed called *farin*. But Maris found it the most delicious meal she had ever eaten.

Evan fed her small spoonfuls, chiding her gently when she sucked too greedily at the wooden spoon.

"I feel like a baby," she objected.

"That's the idea," Evan said. "You have to learn to live all over again. You might as well enjoy it."

But although she might suffer it, a time of forced inactivity was not something Maris could enjoy. As the days passed and she began to spend more time awake she grew restless. Evan was beside her much of the time, coaxing her to eat, reminding her to lie still, and talking to her, always talking, to give her restless mind something to exercise itself on, even though her body must stay motionless.

Evan proved to be a gifted storyteller. He considered himself more an observer of life than a participant, and he had a rather detached outlook and a sharp eye for detail. He made Maris laugh, often; he made her think; and he even managed to make her forget, for minutes at a time, that she was trapped in bed with a broken body.

At first Evan told stories of Thayos society, his descriptions so vivid that she could almost see the people he spoke of. But after a time his talk turned to himself, and he offered her his own life, as if in exchange for the confidences she had made to him during her delirium.

He had been born in the deep woods of Thayos, an island on the northern fringe of Eastern, sixty years before. His parents were foresters, people who lived off the land and traded herbs and firewood for the few things they wanted which the forest could not provide.

There had been other families in the forest, other children to play with, but from his earliest years Evan had preferred the time he spent alone. He liked to hide in the brush to watch the shy, brown dirt-diggers; to hunt out the places where the most beautifully scented flowers and tastiest roots grew; to sit quietly in a small clearing with a chunk of stale bread, and tame the birds to come to his hand.

When Evan was sixteen, his older sister became pregnant and a midwife was sent for. Jani, the midwife, was a small, brown woman with a ready wit and a sharp tongue. Evan fell passionately in love with her.

In order to be near her, Evan appointed himself Jani's assistant. She seemed amused by his interest at first, but soon accepted him, and Evan, his interest sharpened by love, learned a great deal from her. Jani did not call herself by the title of healer, but she might have, for her knowledge was not limited to obstetrics. She could set an arm or leg, treat fevers and chills, and had even performed surgery successfully. But her main interest was midwifery, and she travelled around Thayos assisting at births, advising pregnant women, and helping out as a nurse-maid. She did not have much use for men, and no interest in them sexually or emotionally — or so she told Evan when, on the eve of her departure, he confessed his love for her. She wouldn't stay, and she wouldn't take him with her — not as lover, not as friend, not even as assistant, although she admitted he had learned well and had a skilful touch. She travelled alone always, and that was that.

Evan continued to practice his new healing skills when Jani had gone. Since the nearest healer lived in Thossi village, a full day's walk from the forest, Evan was soon much in demand. Eventually he apprenticed himself to Vera, the healer in Thossi. He might have attended a college of healers, as Vera suggested, but that would have meant a sea-voyage, and the idea of travelling on the dangerous water frightened him as nothing else ever had.

When Vera had taught him all she could, Evan returned to the forest to live and work. Although he never married, he did not always live alone. Women sought him out — wives seeking an undemanding lover, travelling women who paused a few days or months in his company, patients who stayed until their passion for him was

cured.

Maris, listening to his soft, mellow voice and gazing at his face for so many hours that she knew it as well as that of any lover in her past, understood the attraction. The bright blue eyes, the skilful, gentle hands, the high cheekbones and imposing beak of a nose. She wondered, though, what he had felt — was he as self-contained as he seemed?

Maris interrupted his story of a family of tree-kits he'd recently found to ask, "Didn't you ever fall in love? After Jani, I mean."

He looked surprised. "Yes, of course I did. I told you about. . ."

"But not enough to want to marry someone."

"Sometimes I did. With S'Rai — she lived here with me for almost a year, and we were very happy together. I loved her very much. I wanted her to stay. But she had her own life elsewhere. She never meant to stay as long as she did when she came to Thayos. She wouldn't stay in the forest with me; she left."

"Why didn't you go away with her? Didn't she ask you to?"

Evan looked unhappy. "Yes, she did. She wanted me to go with her; I wanted her to stay with me. Somehow it just didn't seem possible. I never wanted to leave the forest."

"You've never been anywhere else?"

"I've travelled all over Thayos, of course, whenever there has been need," Evan said, rather defensively. "And I lived in Thossi for nearly two years when I was younger."

"All Thayos is much the same," Maris said, shrugging her good shoulder. There was a twinge in her left which she ignored. She was allowed to sit up now, and she was afraid Evan would revoke the privilege if she ever admitted to pain. "Some parts have more trees, some parts have more rocks."

Evan laughed. "A very superficial view! To you, I suppose, all parts of the forest would seem identical."

This was so obvious as to require no comment. Maris persisted. "You've never been off Thayos."

Evan grimaced. "Once," he said. "There'd been an accident, a boat cracked up against the rocks, and the woman in it had been badly injured. Her companions were afraid to move her, so I was taken out in a fishing boat to see to her. I got so sick on the journey out that I could scarcely help

her."

Maris smiled sympathetically, but she shook her head. "How can you know that this is the only place you ever want to live if you've never been anywhere else?"

"I don't claim to know that, Maris. I might have left, I might have had a very different life. But this is what I've chosen. I know this life — it's mine, for better or worse. It's rather late now to mourn all the opportunities I've missed. I'm happy with my life." He rose then, ending the conversation. "Now it's time for your nap."

"Can't I . . ."

"You may do whatever you like, as long as you do it lying flat on your back without moving."

Maris laughed, and let him help her back down on the bed. She wouldn't admit it, but sitting up all morning had tired her, and it was a welcome relief to rest. Evan counselled patience, but the slowness of her body to mend frustrated her. And she didn't understand why, just because a few bones were broken, she should tire so easily. She closed her eyes, listening to the sounds Evan made as he tended the fire and tidied the room.

She thought about Evan. She was attracted to him, and of course the circumstances had made for an easy intimacy between them. She had imagined that, once she mended, she and Evan might become lovers. She thought better of it now, knowing more of his life. Evan had loved, and been left, too many times. She liked him too well to want to hurt him, and she knew that she would leave Thayos, and Evan, just as soon as she could fly again. It was better, she decided sleepily, that she and Evan remain only friends. She would have to ignore how much she liked that bright sparkle in his blue eyes, and forget her fantasies about his slim, wiry body and skilled hands.

She smiled and yawned and fell asleep, to dream that she was teaching Evan how to fly.

THE NEXT day the world, so long limited to one room and one other human being, suddenly expanded. S'Rella arrived.

Maris was drowsy and half asleep, and at first she thought she was dreaming. The stuffy room suddenly became fresher, full of the clean, sharp scent of the sea winds, and when Maris looked up S'Rella was standing in the doorway, wings slung over

one arm. For an instant she looked like the shy, slight girl she had been more than twenty years ago, when Maris had helped teach her to fly. But she smiled then, a self-assured smile that lit her dark, thin face and emphasized the lines that time had left there. And when she came forward, spraying salt water from her wings and wet clothes, the phantom of S'Rella the wood-winger dissolved entirely, and she was S'Rella of Veleth, a seasoned flyer and the mother of two grown daughters.

Her cry of greeting cut off Evan's more tentative introduction, and she hurried past him to the bed. The two women embraced, awkwardly because of the huge cast protecting Maris' left arm, but with fierce emotion.

"I came as soon as I heard, Maris," S'Rella said. "I'm sorry you had to be here alone for so long, but communication among flyers isn't what it once was, especially for one-wings. I might not be here now, but I had to fly a message to Big Shotan, and afterwards I decided to visit the Eyrie. A strange whim, now that I think about it — it must have been four, five years since the last time. Corina was there, fresh from Amberly, and she told me that an Eastern flyer had just brought word of your accident. I left at once. I was so worried. . . ." And she bent down to hug her friend again, the wings almost slipping from her grasp.

"Let me hang them for you," Evan said quietly, stepping forward. S'Rella handed them to him with hardly a glance, her attention all for Maris.

"How . . . how are you?" she asked.

Maris smiled. With her good arm she threw back the blanket, revealing two cast-bound legs. "Broken, as you can see, but mending. Or so Evan assures me. My ribs hardly pain me at all now. And I'm sure the casts on these legs are ready to be removed — they itch abominably!" She scowled and pulled a long straw from among a vase of flowers on the bedside table. Frowning with concentration, she poked the straw down between flesh and cast. "This helps sometimes, but other times it just makes it worse, by tickling."

"And your arm?"

Maris looked to Evan for the answer.

"Don't put me on the spot, Maris," he said. "You know as much as I do about it. I think your arm is healing properly, and there hasn't been any more infection. As for your legs — you'll be able to scratch them to

your heart's content in a day of two."

Maris gave a small leap of joy, then caught her breath. She turned pale and swallowed hard.

Frowning, Evan stepped toward the bed. "What happened? What hurt you?"

"Nothing," Maris said quickly. "Nothing. I just felt a . . . a little sick, that's all: I must have jarred my arm."

Evan nodded, but he did not look satisfied. "I'll make tea," he said and left the two women alone together.

"Now I want your news," Maris said. "You know mine. Evan has been wonderful, but healing takes so much time, and I've felt so dreadfully cut off here."

"It is a distant place," S'Rella agreed. "And cold." Southerners thought the whole of the world was cold, outside their own archipelago. Maris grinned — it was an old joke between them — and clasped S'Rella's hand.

"Where shall I begin?" S'Rella asked. "Good news or bad? Gossip or politics? You're the one who's bed-bound, Maris. What would you like to know?"

"Everything," Maris said, "but you can begin by about telling me about your daughters."

S'Rella smiled. "S'Rena has decided to marry Arno, the boy who has the meat-pie concession on the docks of Garr. She has the only fruit-pie stand, of course, and they've decided to combine their businesses and corner the waterfront pie market."

Maris laughed. "It seems a very sensible arrangement."

S'Rella sighed. "Oh, yes, a marriage of convenience, all very businesslike. There's not a speck of romance in her soul — sometimes I can hardly believe S'Rena is my daughter."

"Marissa has enough romanticism for two. How is she?"

"Oh, wandering. In love with a singer. I haven't heard from her in a month."

Evan brought in two steaming mugs of tea, his own special brew, fragrant with white blossoms, and then discreetly vanished. "Any news from the Eyrie?" Maris asked.

"A little, but none of it good. Jamis vanished on a flight from Geer to Little Shotan. The flyers fear him lost at sea."

"Oh," Maris said, "I'm sorry. I never knew him well, but he was said to be a good flyer. His father presided over the flyers'

council, back when we adopted the academy system."

S'Rella nodded. "Lori of Varon gave birth," she continued, "but the child was sickly, and died within the week. She's very distraught. Garret too, of course. And T'katin's brother was killed in a storm. He captained a trading ship, you know. They say the storm took the whole fleet. These are hard times, Maris. I've heard they are warring again on Lomarron."

"They may be warring on Thayos too, before very long," Maris said gloomily. "Don't you have any cheerful news?"

S'Rella shook her head. "The Eyrie was not a cheerful place. I got the feeling I was not terribly welcome. One-wings never come there, but there I was, violating the last sanctuary of the flyer-born. It made them all uneasy, though Corina and a few others tried to be polite."

Maris nodded. It was an old story. Tensions between the flyers born to wings and the one-wings who had taken theirs in competitions had been growing for years. Each year saw more land-bound take to the air, and the old flyer families felt more threatened. "How is Val?" she asked.

"Val is Val," S'Rella said. "Richer than ever, but otherwise he doesn't change. The last time I visited Seatooth, he was wearing a belt of linked metal. I can't imagine what it cost. He works with the woodwingers a lot. They all look up to him. The rest of the time he spends partying in Stormtown with Athen and Damen and Ro and the rest of his one-wing cronies. I hear he's taken up with a land-bound woman on Poweet, but I don't think he's bothered to tell Cara. I tried to scold him about it, but you know how self-righteous Val can get. . . ."

Maris smiled. "Ah, yes," she said. She sipped at her tea as S'Rella continued, the talk ranging all over Windhaven. They gossiped about other flyers, spoke of friends and family and places where they both had been, continuing a long-running, far-ranging conversation. Maris felt comfortable, happy and relaxed. Her captivity would not last much longer — she would be walking again in a matter of days, and then she could begin to exercise and work out, to get back in flying trim — and S'Rella, her closest friend, was now beside her to remind her of her real life that waited beyond these thick walls, and to help her back into it.

A few hours later Evan joined them with

plates of cheese and fruit, freshly baked herb bread and eggs scrambled with wild onions and peppers.

They all sat on the big bed and ate hungrily. Conversation, or new hope, had given Maris a ravenous appetite. The conversation turned to politics. "Will there really be war here?" S'Rella asked. "What's the cause?"

"A rock," Evan grumbled. "A rock barely a half-mile across and two miles long. It doesn't even have a name. It sits square in the Tharin Straight between Thayos and Thrane, and everyone thought it was worthless. Only now they've found iron on it. It was a party from Thrane that found the ore and began working it, and they aren't about to give up their claim, but the rock is marginally closer to Thayos than it is to Thrane, so our Landsman is trying to grab it. He sent a dozen landsguard to seize the mine, but they were beaten off, and now Thrane is fortifying the rock."

"Thayos doesn't seem to have a strong claim," S'Rella said. "Will your Landsman really go to war over it?"

Evan sighed. "I wish I thought otherwise. But the Landsman of Thayos is a belligerent man, and a greedy one. He beat down Thrane once before, in a fishing dispute, and he's certain he can do it again. He'd rather kill any number of people than compromise."

"The message I was to fly to Thrane was full of threats," Maris offered. "I'm surprised war hasn't broken out already."

"Both islands are gathering allies, arms, and promises," Evan said. "I am told flyers come and go from the keep every day. No doubt the Landsman will press a threat or two on you, S'Rella, when you leave. Our own flyers, Tya and Jem, haven't had a day's rest for the past month. Jem has carried most of the messages back and forth across the Straight, and Tya has carried offers and promises to dozens of potential allies. Luckily, none of them seem interested. Time after time she has come back with refusals. I think it is only that keeping the war at bay." He sighed again. "But it is only a matter of time," he said, his voice weary, "and there will be much killing before it is all over. I'll be called in to patch up those who can be patched up. It's a mockery — a healer in war-time treats the symptoms without being allowed to talk about healing the actual cause, the war itself, unless he wants to be locked up as a



traitor."

"I suppose I should be relieved to be out of it," Maris said. But her voice was reluctant. She didn't feel as Evan did about war; flyers stayed above such conflicts, just as they skimmed above the treacherous sea. They were neutrals, never to be harmed. Objectively war was a thing to be regretted, but war had never touched Maris or any of those she had loved, and she could not feel the horror of it too deeply. "When I was younger, I could learn a message without ever hearing it, really. But I seem to have lost the talent. Some of the words I've carried have taken the joy out of flight."

"I know," S'Rella agreed. "I've seen the results of some messages I've flown, and sometimes I feel very guilty."

"Don't," Maris said. "You are a flyer. You aren't responsible."

"Val disagrees, you know," S'Rella said. "I argued it with him once. He thinks we are responsible."

"Yes," said Maris, "but a flyer carried the order for his father's execution. Remember that."

Evan was looking at the two women thoughtfully. "If some messages make you feel guilty," he asked S'Rella, "why do you carry them?"

S'Rella looked briefly startled. "Why, because I'm a flyer," she said. "It's my job. It's what I do. The responsibility comes with the wings."

"I suppose," Evan said. He stood and began collecting the empty plates. "I don't think I could take that attitude, frankly. But I'm a land-bound, not a flyer. I wasn't born to wings."

"Nor were we," Maris started to say, but Evan left the room. She felt a flash of annoyance, but then S'Rella began to talk again, and Maris was drawn back into the conversation, and it was not very long until she had forgotten what she was annoyed about.

AT LAST IT WAS time for the casts to be cut off. Her legs were to be freed, and Evan promised that it would not be much longer for her arm.

Maris cried out at the sight of her legs. They were so thin and pale, so odd-looking. Evan began to massage them gently, washing them with a warm, herb-scented solution, and gently, skillfully kneading the long-unused muscles. Maris sighed with pleasure and relaxed. There

were twinges of pain as Evan pushed and prodded, but it was the pain of returning life.

When at last Evan had done, and he rose and put away the bowl and cloth, Maris thought she would burst with impatience. "Can I walk?" she asked.

Evan looked at her, grinning. "Can you?"

Her heart lifted at the challenge, and she sat up and slipped her legs over the edge of the bed. S'Rella offered her support, but Maris shook her head slightly, motioning her friend away.

Then she stood. On her own two feet, without support. But there was something wrong. She felt dizzy and sick. She said nothing but her face gave her away.

Evan and S'Rella moved closer. "What's wrong?" Evan asked.

"I, I must have stood up too fast. Dizzy." She was sweating, and afraid to move at all, afraid she would fall or faint or throw up.

"Take it easy," Evan said. "There's no rush." His voice was warm and soothing, and he took her good arm. S'Rella offered support on her left side. This time Maris did not shake them off or try to move alone.

"One step at a time," said Evan.

Leaning on them, guided by them, Maris took her first few steps. She felt mildly nauseated still, and strangely disoriented. But also she felt triumphant. Her legs were working again!

"Pain?" asked Evan.

"No. They feel stiff and strange — but they don't hurt."

S'Rella and Evan walked Maris back to the bed, and Evan had her flex the muscles in each leg, bend and kick them.

"Can I walk by myself now?"

"I don't know why not."

She stood by herself, cautiously, anticipating the dizziness. But it was much less this time. She saw that S'Rella was smiling and hopeful; Evan simply watchful.

Maris took her first unsupported step, and then her second. Her spirits lifted. It was easy! Her legs were as good as ever. Trying to ignore the uneasiness in her stomach, Maris took her third step, and the room tilted sideways.

Her arms flailed and she stumbled, seeking level ground in the suddenly shifting room, and then Evan caught hold of her.

"NO!" she cried. "I can do it. . ."

He helped her back on her feet and steadied her.

"Let me go, please."

He did as she asked.

Maris drew a shaky hand across her face and looked around. The room was calm and still, the floor as flat as it had ever been. Her legs held up firmly. She took a deep breath and began to walk again.

The floor suddenly slipped out from under her feet, and would have hit her in the face had not Evan caught her again.

"Back to the bed," he said. "S'Rella — hand me the basin."

"I'm fine — I can walk — let me do it. . ."

But then she couldn't speak, because she had to throw up, and blessedly S'Rella was holding a basin before her face.

Afterwards, shaky but feeling better, Maris walked back to the bed with Evan's guidance.

"What a time to get sick," she said, as Evan and S'Rella helped her back into bed. Evan was looking much too grave.

"What's wrong?" Maris asked him.

He shook his head. "Maybe nothing. Maybe just too much exertion too soon."

"Myself, I think it's the way you cook vegetables to mush. My stomach finally revolted," Maris said, hoping for a smile.

But he only said, "Rest awhile. We'll try the walking again this afternoon."

"Oh, walking," said Maris. "That's easy! Well, you saw — I was doing perfectly well until I got sick. My legs are fine."

"Your legs are fine," Evan agreed. "But. . ." He shook his head and sighed. Then he said, "I have to go now and tend a colicky baby. I'll be back in an hour or so — don't try to get up until I return."

Over the next few days Maris learned to walk again. She could not walk too quickly without getting dizzy, and turns were problems for her — she could not understand why, but the level floor seemed to become a treacherous surface full of dips and valleys to trip her up.

She was elated when Evan removed the cast from her arm; overjoyed that the arm proved whole and strong, with no permanent damage. She knew she would have to work hard at building up the muscles before she could fly again, but the idea of long, hard hours of exercise excited rather than dismayed her after so much time spent doing nothing.

Too soon, S'Rella announced that she had to leave. A runner had come from the Landsman of Thayos. "He has an urgent message for North Arren," she told Maris

and Evan, making a disgusted face, "and his own flyers are off on other missions. But it is time I left anyway. I must get back to Veleth."

They were gathered around the rough wooden table in Evan's kitchen, drinking tea and eating bread and butter as a farewell breakfast. Maris reached across the table and took S'Rella by the hand. "I'll miss you," she said. "But I'm glad you came."

"I'll return as soon as I can," S'Rella said, "though I expect they'll keep me busy. Anyway, I'll spread the word about your recovery. Your friends will be relieved to hear."

"Maris hasn't entirely recovered," Evan said quietly.

"Oh, that's only a matter of time," Maris said cheerfully. "By the time everyone hears from S'Rella, I'll probably be flying again." She didn't understand Evan's gloom lately; she had expected his spirits to lighten with her own when her arm came out of the cast. "I may meet you in the sky before you get back here!"

Evan looked from Maris to S'Rella. "I'll walk you to the Landsman's keep," he volunteered.

"You needn't bother," she said. "I know my way."

"I'd like to see you off."

Maris stiffened at something undefined in his tone. "Say it here," she said quietly. "Whatever it is, you may as well tell me. I'll find out eventually. And didn't promise me once that you wouldn't lie to me?"

"I've never lied to you, Maris," Evan said. He sighed, and his shoulders slumped, and Maris suddenly saw him as an old man. He should be resting somewhere, she thought, surrounded by grandchildren, looked after, the troubles of his life over.

Evan leaned back in his chair, but looked steadily into Maris' eyes. "Haven't you wondered about the dizziness you feel when you stand or sit or turn too suddenly?"

"I'm still weak. I have to be careful. That's all," Maris said, already defensive. "My limbs are sound."

"Yes, yes, your limbs are sound. We need have no worries about your legs, or your arm. You'll build up your strength again. But there is something else wrong with you, something which can't be re-set, splinted and allowed to heal. I think something happened when you hit your

head on the rock. There was some damage inside, to your brain. It affected your sense of balance, your depth perception, perhaps your vision. I'm not sure what exactly. I know so little — no one knows much — about what goes on up here, out of sight." He tapped his head.

"There's nothing really wrong with me," Maris said in a reasonable tone of voice. "I was dizzy and weak at first, but I'm getting better. I can walk now — you have to admit that — and I'll be able to fly again."

"You are learning to adjust, to compromise, that's all," Evan said. "But I have no doubt that your sense of balance was affected, severely damaged. You will probably learn to adjust — you are learning already — to life on the ground. You can assume that the ground is level, and, unless you have to climb something, you'll be able to walk steadily, if slowly, without falling. But in the air — a skill you need in the air is gone now. I don't think you can adjust to it and learn to fly without it. So much depends on your sense of balance when you fly."

"What do you know about flying? How can you tell me what I need to fly?" Her voice was as hard and cold as ice.

"Maris," whispered S'Rella. She tried to catch Maris' hand, but the injured woman pulled away.

"I know you don't want to accept it," Evan said gently. "But, Maris, you'll have to. On the ground you are safe, you can take certain things for granted. In the air ..."

"I don't believe you," Maris said. "There's nothing wrong with me that won't heal. I will fly again. I was just a little sick, that's all. Why should you assume the worst? Why should I?"

Evan sat still, thinking. Then he rose and went to the corner by the back door, where the firewood was kept. Separate from the logs and kindling were some long, flat boards, left-over lumber which Evan cut up to use as splints. He selected one about six feet long, eight inches wide and two inches thick, and laid it down on the bare boards of the kitchen floor.

He straightened up and looked at Maris. "Can you walk along this?"

Maris raised her eyebrows in mocking surprise. Absurdly, her stomach was tight with nerves. Of course she could do it; she couldn't imagine failing such a test.

She rose from her chair slowly, one hand

gripping the table-edge, wary of the dizziness which still struck when she moved too carelessly. She walked across the floor smoothly, not too slowly, wanting applause for how well she was doing. The floor did not slip or buckle beneath her as it had that first day. Absurd to say there was anything wrong with her sense of balance! She wouldn't fall on level ground, and she wouldn't fall from a two-inch height.

"Shall I hop on one foot?" she asked Evan.

"Just walk along it normally."

Maris stepped upon the plank. It wasn't quite wide enough to stand normally, feet side by side, so she had to take a second step at once, with no time for consideration. She tried not to hesitate. She remembered high cliff edges she had skipped along as a child, some with paths narrower than this board.

The board wobbled and shifted beneath her feet. Despite herself, Maris cried out as she felt herself falling to one side. Evan caught her.

"You made the board move!" she said in sudden fury. But the words sounded petulant and childish in her ears. Evan only looked at her. Maris tried to calm herself. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean that. Let me try again."

Silently, he let go of her and stepped back.

Tense now, Maris stepped up again and walked three steps. She began to waver. One foot went over the side onto the floor. She cursed and pulled it back, and took another step, and felt the board shift again. Again she missed it. She lifted her foot back onto the board and took another step forward, and lurched to one side, falling.

Evan did not catch her that time. She hit the floor on hands and knees and jumped up, her head spinning from the exertion. She conquered the urge to be sick, and grimly stepped onto the board again. And missed it. And stepped, and missed again. And walked, and fell. And walked, and fell.

"Maris, enough." Evan's firm, gentle hands were upon her, pulling her to her feet, away from the treacherous plank. Maris could hear S'Rella weeping softly.

"All right," Maris said. She tried to keep the anguish out of her voice. "There's something wrong. All right. I admit it. But I'm still healing. Give me time. I will get well. I will fly again."

"Maris..." Evan began.

"Don't," she warned. "I know what you're going to say. Don't say it. I won't have you telling me what I can and can't do. When I was a little girl, my mother told me not to dream of being a flyer, that it was impossible. But I became a flyer. Later they said I had to give up my wings. They all said so; my stepfather, and the Landsman, the flyers, all the laws and traditions. But I kept my wings, and I helped to open the sky to other land-bound children. Then the academies almost died, but we fought to keep them alive, and we won. Now there are a dozen academies, and new ones open every year. It wasn't possible, but we did it. So don't tell me I can't fly, Evan. You don't know me. I'm a flyer. I will fly. Maybe not today, but soon. Maybe it will take a week, or a month, but that doesn't matter. In the end, I'll fly. It's not just what I do, Evan. It's what I am. I will fly again. I will.

"I have to!"

IN THE MORNING, Maris began exercising in earnest. Evan brought her a set of stone weights, and she began working out regularly. She was dismayed to find that both her arms, not merely the injured one, were sadly weakened by her time of enforced idleness.

Determined to test the air again as soon as possible, Maris had her wings taken to the keep, to the Landsman's own metalsmith, for repair. The woman was busy with preparations for the impending war, but a flyer's request was never to be ignored, and she promised to have the damaged struts straightened and restored within a week. She was true to her word.

Maris checked out her wings carefully on the day they were returned, folding and unfolding each strut in turn, scanning the fabric to make sure it was taut and firmly mounted. Her hands fell to the task as if they had never stopped doing it; they were a flyer's hands, and there was nothing in all the world they knew how to do better than tend a pair of wings. Almost Maris was tempted to strap on the wings, and make the long walk to flyer's cliff. Almost, but not quite. Her balance was not yet come to her, she thought, though she was steadier on her feet now. Every night, surreptitiously, she gave herself the plank test. She had not yet passed it, but she was improving. She was not yet ready for wings, but soon, soon.

She hung them over Evan's mantle, as

an incentive, and went back to her exercises. She worked with weights, to build up her arms, and ran to strengthen her legs, and ate well to restore her trim and her endurance.

When she was not working, sometimes she walked with Evan in the forest, when he went abroad to gather herbs or tend to other patients. He taught her the names of the plants he used in his work, and explained what each herb was good for, and when and how to use it. He showed her all manner of animals as well; the beasts of chilly Eastern forests were not all like the familiar denizens of Lesser Amberly's tame woods, and Maris found them endlessly fascinating. Evan seemed so at home in the forest that the creatures did not fear him. Strange white crows with scarlet eyes accepted breadcrumbs from his fingers, and he knew the hidden entrances to the tunnel-monkey lairs that honeycombed the wild, and once he caught her arm and pointed out a hooded torturer, gliding sensuously from limb to limb in pursuit of some unseen prey.

Maris responded with stories of her adventures in the sky and on other islands. She had been a flyer for almost forty years, and her head was full of wonders. She told him of life on Lesser Amberly, of Stormtown with its windmills and its wharfs, of the vast blue-white glaciers of Artellia and the fire mountains of the Embers. She talked of the loneliness of the Outer Islands, hard up against the Endless Ocean to the east, and the fellowship that had once thrived on the Eyrie before flyers had divided into factions.

Neither ever spoke of what lay between them, dividing them. Evan did not contradict Maris when she spoke of flying, nor did he mention that invisible damage to her head. The subject was like a patch of dangerous ground, no wider than a wooden plank, upon which neither was willing to step. Maris kept her occasional dizzy spells to herself, and convinced herself that she was recovering.

One day as they stepped outside Evan's house, Maris stopped him from turning deeper into the forest. "All those trees make me feel like I'm still inside," she complained. "I need to see the sky, to smell clean, open air. How far away is the sea?"

Evan gestured to the north. "About two miles that way. You can see where the trees begin to thin."

Maris grinned at him. "You sound reluctant. Do you feel sad when there aren't any trees around? You don't have to come if you can't bear it — but I don't understand how you can breathe in that forest. It's too dim and close. Nothing to smell but dirt and rot and leaf-mold."

"Wonderful smells," Evan said, smiling back. They began to walk towards the north. "The sea is too cold and empty and big for my tastes. I feel comfortable and at home in my forest."

"Ah, Evan, we're so different, you and I!" She touched his arm and grinned at him, somehow pleased by the contrast. She threw her head back and sniffed the air. "Yes, I can smell the sea already!"

"You could smell it on my doorstep — you can smell the sea all over Thayos," Evan pointed out.

"The forest disguised it." Maris felt her heart lightening with the thinning of the forest. All her life had been spent beside the sea, or over it. She had felt the lack every morning waking in Evan's house, missing the pounding of the waves and the sharp salt smell, but most of all missing the sight of that vast, grey immensity, beneath an equally immense and turbulent sky.

The tree-line ended abruptly, and the rocky cliffs began. Maris broke into a run, ignoring Evan's soft warning, ignoring her own internal fear of sudden dizziness. She stopped on the cliff's edge, breathing hard, and gazed out over the sea and the sky.

The sky was indigo, filled with rapidly scudding grey clouds. The wind was relatively gentle at this height, but Maris could tell from the patient circling of a pair of scavenger-kites that higher the flying was still good. Not a day for rushing urgent messages, perhaps, but a good day for playing, for swooping and diving and laughing in the cool air.

She heard Evan approaching. "You can't tell me that's not beautiful," she said, without turning. She took another step closer to the edge of the cliff and looked down . . .

. . . and felt the world drop out beneath her, up and down suddenly inextricably confused. She gasped for breath and her arms flailed, seeking some solidity, and she was falling, falling, falling, and even Evan's arms wrapped tight around her could not draw her back to safety.

IT STORMED all the next day. Maris

spent the day inside, lost in her depression, trying not to think of what had happened on the cliffs. She did not exercise. She ate listlessly, and had to force herself to tend to her wings. Evan watched her in silence, frowning often.

The rain continued the following day, but the worst of the storm was past, and the downpour grew more gentle. Evan announced that he was going out. "There are some things I need from Port Thayos," he said, "herbs that do not grow here. A trader came in last week, I understand. Perhaps I will be able to replenish my stores."

"Perhaps," Maris said evenly. She was tired, though she had done nothing this morning except eat breakfast. She felt old.

"Would you like to walk with me? You have never seen Port Thayos."

"No," Maris said. "I don't feel up to it just now. I'll spend the day here."

Evan frowned, but reached for his heavy raincoat nonetheless. "Very well," he said. "I will be back before dark."

But it was well after dark when the healer finally returned, carrying a basket full of bottled herbs. The rain had finally stopped. Maris had begun to worry about him when the sun went down. "You're late," she said when he entered, and shook the rain from his cloak. "Are you all right?"

Evan hardly seemed to hear her. He was smiling; Maris had never seen him quite so happy. "News, good news," he said. "The port is full of it. There will be no war. The Landsmen of Thayos and Thranë have agreed to a personal meeting on that accursed rock, to work out a compromise about mining rights!"

"No war," Maris said, a little dully. "Good, good. Odd, though. How did it happen?"

Evan started a fire and began to make some tea. "Oh, it was all happenstance," he said. "Tya returned from another mission, bearing nothing. Our Landsman was rebuffed on all sides. Without allies, he did not feel strong enough to press his claims. He is furious, I'm told, but what can he do? Nothing. So he sent Jem to Thranë to set up a meeting, to haggle out whatever settlement he can. Anything is better than nothing. It's all very odd. I would have thought he'd find support on Cheslin or Thrynel, particularly if he offered them a large enough share of the iron. And certainly there is no love lost between Thranë and the Arrens." Evan laughed. "Ah, what

does it matter? The war is off, and I'm delighted. Port Thayos is giddy with relief, except for a few landsguard who'd hoped to weigh down their pockets with iron. Everyone is celebrating, and we should celebrate too."

Evan went to his basket and rummaged among the herbs, pulling out a large moonfish. "I thought perhaps seafood would cheer you up," he said. "I know a way of cooking this with dandyweed and bitternuts that will make your tongue sing." He found a long bone knife, and began to scale the fish, whistling happily as he worked, and his mood was so infectious that Maris found herself smiling too.

There was a loud knocking at the door.

Evan looked up, scowling. "An emergency, no doubt," he said, cursing. "Answer it if you would, Maris. My hands are full of fish."

The girl standing in the door wore a dark green uniform, trimmed with grey fur; a landsguard, and one of the Landsman's runners. "Maris of Lesser Amberly?" she asked.

"Yes," Maris said.

The girl nodded. "The Landsman of Thayos sends his greetings, and invites you and the healer Evan to honor him at dinner tomorrow night. If your health permits it."

"My health permits it," Maris snapped. "Why are we suddenly so honored, child?"

The runner had a seriousness beyond her years. "The Landsman honors all flyers, and your injury in his service has weighed heavily on him. He wished to show his gratitude to all the flyers who have flown for Thayos, however briefly, in the emergency just past."

"Oh," Maris said. She still was not satisfied. The Landsman of Thayos had not struck her as the type who cared much about expressing gratitude. "Is that all?"

The girl hesitated. Briefly her detachment left her, and Maris saw that she was indeed very young. "It is not part of the message, flyer, but . . ."

"Yes?" Maris prompted. Evan had stopped his work to stand behind her.

"Late this afternoon, a flyer arrived, with a message for the Landsman's ears only. He received her in private chambers. She was from Western, I think. She dressed funny, and her hair was too short."

"Describe her, if you can," Maris said. She took a copper coin from a pocket and let her fingers play with it.

The girl looked at the coin and smiled. "Oh, she was a Westerner, young — twenty or twenty-five. Her hair was black, cut just like yours. She was very pretty. I don't think I've ever seen anyone as pretty. She had a nice smile, I thought, but the lodge men didn't like her. They said she didn't even bother thanking them for their help. Green eyes. She was wearing a choker. Three strands of colored sea-glass. Is that enough?"

"Yes," Maris said. "You're very observant." She gave the girl the coin.

"You know her?" Evan asked. "This flyer?"

Maris nodded. "I've known her since the day she was born. I know her parents well."

"Who is she?" he demanded, impatiently.

"Corina," said Maris, "of Lesser Amberly."

The runner remained at the door. Maris glanced back at her. "Yes?" she asked. "Is there more? We accept the invitation, of course. You may give the Landsman our thanks."

"There's more," the girl blurted. "I forgot. The Landsman said, most respectfully, that you are requested to bring your wings, if that would not put too great a burden on your health."

"My wings? . . ."

"He would like you to fly for him," the runner said. Her smile was innocent. "If you would, of course."

"Of course," Maris repeated numbly. "Of course."

She closed the door.

THE KEEP OF the Landsman of Thayos was a grim, martial place that lay well away from the island's towns and villages in a narrow, secluded valley of its own. It was close to the sea, but shielded from it by a solid wall of mountains. By land, only two roads gave approach, and both were fortified by landsguard. A stone watchtower stood atop the tallest peak, a high sentinel for all the paths leading to the keep.

The fortress itself was old and stern, built of great blocks of weathered black stone. Its back was to the mountain, and Maris knew from her last visit that much of it lay underground, in chambers chiseled from solid rock. Its exterior face showed a double set of wide walls — landsguard armed with longbows walked patrol on the parapets — ringing a cluster of wooden buildings and

two black towers, the taller of which was almost fifty feet high. Stout wooden bars closed off the tower windows. The valley, so close to the sea, was damp and cold. The only ground cover was a tenacious violet lichen, and a blue-green moss that clung to the underside of boulders and half-covered the walls of the keep.

Coming up the road from Thossi, Maris and Evan were stopped once at the valley checkpoint, passed, stopped again at the outer wall, and finally admitted to the keep. They might have been detained longer, but Maris was carrying her bright silver wings, and landsguard did not trifle with flyers. The inner courtyard was full of activity; children playing with great shaggy dogs, fierce-looking pigs running everywhere, landsguard drilling with bow and club. A gibbet had been built against one wall, its wood cracked and well-weathered. The children played all about it, and one of them was using a noose as a swing. The other two hung empty, twisting ominously in the chill wind of evening.

"This place oppresses me," Maris told Evan. "The Landsman of Lesser Amberly lives in a huge wooden manor on a hill overlooking the town. It has twenty guest rooms, and a tremendous banquet hall, and wonderful windows of colored glass, and a beacon tower for summoning flyers — but it has no walls, and no guards, and no gibbets."

"The Landsman of Lesser Amberly is chosen by the people," Evan said. "The Landsman of Thayos is from a line that has ruled here since the days of the star sailors. And you forget, Maris, that Eastern is not as gentle a land as Western. Winter lasts longer here. Our storms are colder and fiercer. Our soil has more metal, but it is not so good for growing things as the soil in the West. Famine and war are never very far away on Thayos."

They passed through a massive gate, down into the interior of the keep, and Maris fell silent.

The Landsman met them in his private reception chamber, seated in a plain wooden throne and flanked by two sour-faced landsguard. But he rose when they entered; landsguards and flyers were equal. "I'm pleased you could accept my invitation, flyer," he said. "There was some concern about your health."

Despite the polite words, Maris did not like him. The Landsman was a tall, well-

proportioned man with regular, almost handsome, features, his grey hair worn long and knotted behind his head in the Eastern fashion. But there was something disturbing about his manner, and he had a puffiness around his eyes, and a twitch at the corner of his mouth that his full beard did not quite conceal. His dress was rich and somber; thick blue-grey cloth trimmed with black fur, thigh boots, a wide leather belt inlaid with iron and silver and gemstones. And he wore a small metal dagger.

"I appreciate your concern," Maris replied. "I was badly injured, but I have recovered my health now. You have a great treasure here on Thayos in Evan. I have met many healers, but few as skilled as he."

The Landsman sank back into his chair. "He will be well-rewarded," he said, as if Evan was not even present. "Good work deserves a good reward, eh?"

"I will pay Evan myself," Maris said. "I have sufficient iron."

"No," the Landsman insisted. "Your near-death in my service gave me great distress. Let me show my gratitude."

"I pay my own debts," Maris said.

The Landsman's face grew cold. "Very well, he said. "There is another matter we must discuss, then. But let it wait for dinner. Your walk must have left you hungry." He stood up abruptly. "Come, then. You'll find I set a good table, flyer. I doubt you've ever had better."

As it turned out, Maris had eaten better on countless occasions. The food was plentiful, but badly-prepared. The fish soup was far too salty, the bread was hard and dry, and the meat courses had all been boiled until even the memory of taste had fled. Even the beer tasted sour to her.

They ate in a dim, damp banquet hall, at a long table set for twenty. Evan, looking desperately uncomfortable, was placed well down the table, among several landsguard officers and the Landsman's younger children. Maris occupied a position of honor at the Landsman's side next to his heir, a sharp-faced, sullen woman who did not speak three words during the entire meal. Across from her the other flyers were seated. Closest to the Landsman was a weary grey-faced man with a bulbous nose that Maris recognized vaguely from past encounters as the flyer Jem. Third down was Corina of Lesser Amberly. She smiled at

Maris across the table. Corina was terribly pretty, Maris thought, remembering what the runner had said. But then, her father Corm had always been handsome; before he had married, half the women on Amberly had been madly in love with him.

"You look well, Maris," Corina said. "I'm glad. We were very worried about you."

"I am well," Maris said. "I hope to be flying again soon."

A shadow passed across Corina's pretty face. "Maris..." she started. Then she thought better. "I hope so," she finished weakly. "Everyone asks about you. We'd like you home again." She looked down and occupied herself with her meal.

Between Jem and Corina sat the third flyer, a young woman strange to Maris. After an abortive attempt to start a conversation with the Landsman's daughter, Maris fell to studying the stranger over her food. She was the same age as Corina, but the contrast between the two women was marked. Corina was vibrant and beautiful; dark hair, clean healthy skin, green eyes sparkling and alive, and an air of confidence and easy sophistication. A flyer, daughter of two other flyers, born and raised to the privileges and traditions that went with the wings.

The woman next to her was almost painfully thin, though she had a look of stubborn strength about her. Her rough-woven clothes fit badly, bagging as if they were far too large for her. Pockmarks covered her hollow cheeks, and her pale blond hair was knotted in an awkward lump behind her head and pulled back in such a way as to make her forehead seem abnormally high. When she smiled, Maris saw that her teeth were crooked and discolored.

"You're Tya, aren't you?" she said.

The woman regarded her with shrewd black eyes. "I am." Her voice was startlingly pleasant; cool and soft, with a faint ironic undertone.

"I don't think we've ever met," Maris said. "Have you been flying long?"

"I won my wings two years ago, in the competition on North Arren."

Maris nodded. "I missed that one. I think I was off on a mission to Artellia. Have you ever flown to Western?"

"Three times," Tya replied. "Twice to Big Shotan and once to Culhall. Never to the Amberlys. Most of my flying has been in Eastern, especially these days." She gave her Landsman a quick sharp glance from

the corner of her eyes, and smiled a conspiratorial smile at Maris.

Corina, who had been listening, tried to be polite. "What did you think of Stormtown?" she asked. "And the Eyrie? Did you visit the Eyrie?"

Tya smiled tolerantly. "I'm a one-wing," she said. "I trained at Airhome. We don't go to your Eyrie, flyer. As to Stormtown, it was impressive. There's no city like it in Eastern."

Corina flushed. Maris was briefly annoyed. The friction between flyers born to wings and the upstart one-wings depressed her endlessly; the skies of Windhaven were not the friendly place they had once been, and much of that was her doing. "The Eyrie isn't such a bad place, Tya," she said. "I've made a lot of friends there."

"You're not a one-wing," Tya said.

"Oh? Val One-Wing himself once told me I was the first one-wing, whether I admitted it or not."

Tya looked at her speculatively. "No," she said finally. "No, that isn't right. You're different, Maris. Not of the old flyers, but not a one-wing either. I don't know what you are. It must be lonely, though."

They finished the meal in a strained, awkward silence.

When the dessert cups had been cleared away, the Landsman dismissed family, counselors, and landguard, so only the four flyers and Evan remained. He tried to dismiss Evan as well, but the stubborn healer would not go. "Maris is still in my care," he said. "I stay with my patient." The Landsman gave him an angry stare, but elected not to press the point.

"Very well," he snapped. "We have business to discuss. Flyer business." He turned his hot eyes on Maris. "I will be direct. I have received a message from my colleague, the Landsman of Lesser Amberly. He inquires after your health. Your wings are needed. When will you be well enough to return to Amberly?"

"I don't know," Maris said. "You can see that I've recovered. But the flight from Thayos to Amberly is taxing for any flyer, and I do not have my full strength back yet. I will depart Thayos as soon as I can."

"A long flight," the flyer Jem agreed, "especially for one who does not even make short flights."

"Yes," the Landsman said. "You and the healer have done a lot of walking. You seem healthy again. Your wings are

repaired, I am told. Yet you do not fly. You have never come to flyer's cliff. You do not practice. Why?"

"I am not ready," Maris said.

"Landsman," said Jem, "it is as I told you. She is not recovered, no matter how it seems. If she were able, she would be flying." He shifted his gaze to her. "I'm sorry if I hurt you," he said, "but you know I speak the truth. I am a flyer too. I know. A flyer flies. There is no way to keep a healthy flyer on the ground. And you, you are no ordinary flyer — they used to tell me that you loved flying above all else."

"I did," said Maris. "I do."

"Landsman..." Evan began.

Maris turned her head to look at him. "No, Evan," she said, "the burden isn't yours. I will tell them." She faced the Landsman again. "I am not entirely recovered," she admitted. "My balance... there is something wrong with my balance. But it is healing. It is not so bad as it once was."

"I'm sorry," Tya said quickly. Jem nodded.

"Oh, Maris," Corina said. She looked grief-stricken, suddenly close to tears. Corina had none of her father's malice, and she knew what balance meant to a flyer.

"Can you fly?" the Landsman said.

"I don't know," Maris admitted. "I think I need more time."

"You have had time enough," he said. He turned to Evan. "Healer, can you tell me that she will recover?"

"No," Evan said sadly. "I cannot tell you that. I do not know."

The Landsman scowled. "This affair belongs to the Landsman of Lesser Amberly, but the burden is on me. And I say that a flyer who cannot fly is no flyer at all, and has no need of wings. If your recovery is that uncertain, only a fool would wait for it. I ask you again, Maris — can you fly?"

His eyes were fixed on her, and the corner of his mouth moved in a malicious little twitch, and Maris knew she had run out of time. "I can fly," she said.

"Good," the Landsman said. "Tonight is as good as any other time. You say you can fly. Very well. Get your wings. Show us."

THE WALK through the damp, dripping tunnel was as long as Maris remembered it, and as lonely, though this time she had company. No one talked. The only sound

was the echo of their footsteps. Two landsguard walked ahead of the party with torches. The flyers wore their wings.

It was a cold, starry night on the far side of the mountain. The sea moved restlessly below them, a vast, dark, melancholy presence. Maris climbed the stairs to flyer's cliff. The youth had gone out of her legs; she climbed slowly, and when she reached the top her thighs ached and her breathing was labored.

Evan took her hand briefly. "Can I persuade you not to fly?"

"No," she said. "No."

He nodded. "I thought not. Fly well, then." He kissed her, and stepped away.

The Landsman stood against the cliff, flanked by his landsguard. Tya and Jem unfolded her wings. Corina hung back until Maris called to her. "I'm not angry," she said. "This is not your doing. A flyer isn't responsible for the messages she bears."

"Thank you," Corina said. Her small, pretty face was pale in the starlight.

"If I fail, you are to bring my wings back to Amberly, yes?"

Corina nodded reluctantly.

"Do you know what the Landsman intends to do with them?"

"He will find a new flyer, perhaps someone who has lost his wings by challenge who would be willing to come to Amberly to fly again. Until someone is found... well, mother is ill, but my father is still fit enough to fly."

Maris laughed lightly. "There's a wonderful irony in that. Corm has always wanted my wings — but I'm going to do my best to keep them from him once again."

Corina smiled.

Her wings were fully extended; Maris could feel the familiar, insistent push of the wind against them. She checked her straps and struts, motioned Corina out of her way, and walked to the brink of the precipice. She steadied herself with an effort, and looked down.

The world reeled dizzily, drunkenly. Far below, breakers crashed against black rocks, sea and stone locked in eternal war, but they seemed to spin and haze as Maris looked at them. She swallowed hard, and tried to keep from lurching off the cliff. Slowly the world grew solid and steady again. No motion. It was just a cliff, like any other cliff, and below the endless ocean. The sky was her friend, her lover.

Maris flexed her arms, and took the

wing-grips in hand. Then she took a deep breath and leaped.

Her kick sent her clean away from the cliff, and the wind grabbed her, supporting her. It was a cold, strong wind; a wind that cut through to the bone, but not an angry wind, no, an easy wind to fly. She relaxed and gave herself to it, and she glided down and around in a long graceful curve.

But the current pushed around again toward the mountain, and Maris glimpsed the Landsman and the other flyers waiting there — Jem had unfolded his own wings and was preparing to launch — before she decided to turn away from them. She twisted her body, tried to bank.

The sky lurched and turned fluid on her. She banked too far, stalled, and when she tried to correct by throwing her weight and strength back in the other direction, she tilted wildly. Her breath caught in her throat.

The feel was gone. Maris closed her eyes for an instant, and felt sick. She was falling, her body screamed at her. She was falling, her ears rang, and the feel was gone from her. She had always known: subtle changes in the wind, shifts she had to react to before she was half-aware of them, the taste of a building storm, the omens of still air. Now it was all gone. She flew through an endless empty ocean of air, feeling nothing, dizzy, and this strange savage wind she could not read had her in its grasp.

Her great silver wings tilted back and forth wildly as her body shook, and Maris opened her eyes again, suddenly desperate. She steadied herself and tried to fly on vision alone. But the rocks moved, and it was too dark, and even the bright cold stars above seemed to dance and shift and mock her.

Vertigo reached up and swallowed her whole, and Maris released her wing-grips — she had never done that before, never — and now she was not flying; but only hanging beneath her wings. She doubled over in the straps, retching, and sent the Landsman's dinner down into the ocean. She was trembling violently.

Jem and Corina were both airborne and coming after her, Maris saw when the last spasm had passed. She did not care. She was weak, drained, old. She did not care. There were boats below her, gliding across the black ocean. She saw their lanterns, and did not care. She took her wing-grips in

hand again, tried to pull up, but all she accomplished was a sharp downwind turn that sheered into a plunge. She tried to correct, and couldn't.

She was crying.

The sea came up at her. Shimmering. Shifting.

Her ears hurt.

She could not fly. She was a flyer, had always been a flyer, windlover, woodwinger, skychild, alone, home is the skȳ, flyer, flyer, flyer — and she could not fly.

She closed her eyes again, so the world would stand still.

With a slap and a spray of salt water, the sea took her. It has been waiting, she thought. All those years.

"LEAVE ME ALONE," she said that night, when they finally returned to his home. Evan took her at her word. He cautioned her to keep warm — she had not been in the water long, but the sea around Thayos was icy at this time of year — and then left her alone.

Maris slept most of the next day. She woke briefly around supper time, and she and Evan shared a cold, lifeless meal. "Corina has left by now," she said once, more to herself than to him. He only nodded, and made no attempt at conversation. Maris left her food half-eaten, and went back to bed.

The following day Maris woke early, when the ruddy light of dawn first broke across the room. She felt terrible; cold and sweaty, and a great weight pressed across her chest. For a moment, she could not think what was wrong. Then she remembered. Her wings were gone. She tried to think about it, and the despair welled up inside her, and the anger, and the self-pity, and soon she curled up under the blankets once again and tried to go back to sleep. When she slept, she did not have to face it.

Now sleep would not take her, however. Finally she rose and dressed. Evan was in the next room, cooking eggs. "Hungry?" he asked her.

"No," Maris said dully. "But I'll eat."

Evan nodded, and cracked two more eggs. Maris sat at the table silently. Finally he set a platter in front of her. She ate listlessly. Evan did not press her.

It was a wet, windy day, marked by frequent violent storms. After they had eaten, Evan went about his business. Near noon

he left her, saying only that he a patient to tend to in Thossi. She nodded. He was gone most of the day. Maris sat by the window and watched the rain.

Well after dark Evan returned, wet and dispirited. Maris was still sitting by the window, in a cold and darkened house. "You might at least have started a fire," Evan grumbled. His tone was disgusted.

"Oh," she said. She looked at him, almost without comprehension. "I'm sorry. I didn't think."

Evan built the fire. Maris moved to help him, but he snapped at her and chased her out of the way. They ate in silence, but the food seemed to restore Evan's mood.

Afterwards he brewed some of his special tea, set a mug down in front of her, and settled into his favorite chair.

Maris tasted the steaming tea, conscious of Evan's eyes upon her. Finally she looked up at him.

"How do you feel?" he asked her.

She thought about it. "I feel dead," she said, finally.

"Talk about it."

"I can't," she said. She began to weep. "I can't."

When the weeping would not stop, Evan fixed her a sleeping draught, and put her to bed. ●

George R.R. Martin

Born in Bayonne, New Jersey in 1948, George R.R. Martin was corrupted at an early age by comic books and horror movies. He began making up stories about the same time he learned block printing, but it was not until 1971 that he actually sold one of those stories to a professional magazine. Since then, however, Martin has been a regular contributor to most SF magazines and anthologies, with more than 50 pieces of short fiction to his credit.

His books include *A Song for Lya* and *Other Stories* (Avon, 1976), *Songs of Stars and Shadows* (Pocket Books, 1977), and *Dying of the Light* (Pocket Books, 1978). Forthcoming in 1981 are a new collection, *Sandkings*, from Pocket Books, and *Windhaven*, from Simon & Schuster. Martin is also the editor of the *New Voices* series of original anthologies from Berkley, the fourth volume of which is due this year.

Martin is presently a full-time writer living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is a relative newcomer to the southwest, however, and prior to moving to Santa Fe in 1980 lived in Dubuque, Iowa and Chicago. In years past he has paid the rent by laboring as a college instructor, a chess tournament director, a sportswriter, a VISTA Volunteer, and the Tubs o' Fun man at an amusement park.

"The Storms of Windhaven," the novella that began the Windhaven cycle of stories in 1975, was a Hugo and Nebula award finalist, finishing a close second in both races to a story by Martin's Santa Fe neighbor, Roger Zelazny. Martin has been

nominated for both awards on numerous other occasions. In 1975 his novella "A Song for Lya" was voted the Hugo by members of the World SF Convention. This past year he won his first Nebula for "Sandkings," and scored a rare double victory in the Hugo sweepstakes, winning the best novelette award for "Sandkings" and the best short story trophy for "The Way of Cross and Dragon." As a result, he was expelled from the Hugo Losers' Club he helped found. It is reliably reported that he did not mind.

Lisa Tuttle

Lisa Tuttle is, with George R.R. Martin, the author of *Windhaven*, the novel from which this portion of "The Fall" is taken. (The book will be published by Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books as a Timescape Book in March.)

By herself, she's the author of a couple dozen short stories which have appeared in nearly all the SF magazines and many anthologies including several "Bests."

While some of her stories have been nominated for awards, others have inspired indignant readers to write outraged letters to the editor. She finds both responses equally gratifying.

She is a native Texan who loves to travel and reads and buys books obsessively. Now a full-time writer, she has worked as a journalist, a television critic, a proofreader, and a typesetter.

**Butterflies do it . . . even ugly
ducklings do it . . .**

So I Was Born

Philip Sidney Jennings

So I was born! My earliest memory was the night darkness inside the egg: the realization that I was something. Then came the fissure, the crack in my world, the many little antennal arms and legs I sensed and then felt. They pulled at the shattering egg shell pieces and crammed them gratefully up into their small rubbery mouths so that I was left suddenly shivering on the sidewalk on a piece of shell like a fragment of crazy paving. As I stared at the dark world of Glass Avenue, the last piece of shell was swept out from under my feet, my crouching limbs. I saw it disappear into the mouth of my nearest neighbor.

Who knows who dropped the egg that contained me? It doesn't matter. I was hatched on Glass Avenue on a stretch which was warm and for that, Pewee, my nearest neighbor said I should be duly grateful. I surveyed the grateful world.

We were a strange race — our eyes huge and bulbous, our bodies hooped with ridges, two deep scar grooves in our backs, our arms and legs spindly like antennae. And crouched. We were all crouched. I guess I'll never forget that first sight of Glass Avenue: through the permanent twilight darkness of our planet the monolithic buildings arose. Giant houses of dull glowering light, they towered up to skies where once, I was told, the flare of stars had been visible and the murmur of alien races audible. And we, the Kridles, crouched gratefully on the warm sidewalk of Glass Avenue, good for nothing it seemed, apart from our lives. We ate little, the shell of an infant, a fellow Kridle once in a while. Those who moved up and down the Avenue, which stretched as far as the eye could see and certainly further than our crouching limbs could hop, crawl or walk, did so at an incredible risk. Almost immediately the space they vacated would be taken up by an egg. They could never go back to the same spot again. But that was nothing compared to the danger from the Flyers. All moving Kridles were liable to dive-attacks from the Flyers who lived inside the buildings, outside of which we crouched. I witnessed a dive-attack on the second day of my life. Pewee pointed a limb at a squadron of Flyers that suddenly shot off a diving board, that stuck out of the top of a building like a cold metal tongue.

"There they go!"

I found my tongue, my voice:

"What do they do?"

Pewee's voice was small but he spoke without emotion:

"Whatever they want."

Four of them skidded to a flying halt across the backs of some egg-laying

Kridles. Some eggs smashed. The youngest of the Flyers picked up a piece of shell, nibbled it and spat out his saliva so that it flew like a liquid dumb-bell and wrapped itself around the unblinking eye of an old bloated Kridle.

"How can they eat that shit?"

His fellow Flyers who had been waiting for this performance, were now released into laughter as though a floodgate had been opened.

"What about the smell?"

One of them cried out. Another had taken his charger out and was making waste along the ridged back of the Kridles. As he filled up a scar groove he moved on to the next.

"Smell! I'll give 'em smell!"

The young Flyer threw aside the lower half of his pin striped flying suit and to the outrageous applause of his companions opened his main waste vent on the head of a Kridle just as it came out of its shell for the first time in its life. Then they saw the moving Kridle. He was old, moving slowly over the backs of his companions.

"Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!" their voices rang out. They shot up into the ether and became tiny black dots, almost invisible. I was just about to drop them out of my vision when suddenly the dots started getting bigger and bigger, then at a terrible speed they were screaming in dive-attack formation towards the Kridle that had struggled to move. The pin striped suits of the Flyers were tapered and stretched out behind them. They were not detachable but part of their bodies like the scales of an armadillo or dragon. Beneath their noseless faces their bills were long and razor-sharp. Their eyes big with their mirth not a moment ago, were now tiny points of concentration, impenetrable dark tunnels: the barrel of a two-eyed gun. I watched with my two-day-old eyes. The Kridle knew his end had come. He glanced at those he had crouched next to for so many years. Soon he would be nothing more than a steak for them. Pewee said flatly:

"May his spear fly home!"

"What do you mean?" I said, my knowledge of the world almost complete, my innocence all but gone. He touched the pointed end of my rump and then a small rib-like lever beneath it.

"You've got a spear in there. It's a deadly weapon. You can kill with it but it will also kill you." He shrugged. "So no Kridle uses it anyway. You can't win, I guess."

The Flyers came in low over the Kridle. I gasped. The old Kridle had tried to fire his spear but to no avail. It remained stuck half-way out of his back. His eyes began to fog in a glaze of death. The Flyers came snarling in again. Robbed of their cruelty, they cut the Kridle in a thousand angry pieces. Nor was he the only one to suffer that day. Many Kridles fell beneath the razor bills of the sporting Flyers. Antennae, eyes, legs, the squashy insides of Kridles, spluttered and splattered in a filthy confusion of churning body meat. Only much later were the Flyers satisfied. Then, sweating, exhausted, they rested on the backs of the living and dying Kridles and brought out their chargers as though the action had somehow called for some release of refuse. Silently the living Kridles squirmed, knowing that soon the Flyers would be gone.

"Pewee," I whispered. "Why didn't his spear fly?"

Pewee shook his head, "He was too old. It was rusted in his back. He was dead anyway. What does it matter?"

I sensed Pewee didn't want to talk but I said out loud anyway:

"You can throw a spear when you're young but it kills you. You can't throw it when you're old because it gets stuck, but it still kills you."

Pewee was munching a Kridle part that had been thrown in our direction. He nodded and kept on eating as though that was all that mattered. I drew the covers down over my eyes and my first sleep in the world took me out of the world into which I had been born and back into the dark of the egg which no longer held me.

TWO TWILIGHTS later I ate a small piece of Pewee. He was killed by a Flyer who thought the funniest way to rid a building of outdated machine parts was simply to pick them up, carry them out and dump them on the crouching backs of Kridles. Pewee's place was soon filled by an egg which hatched into a Kridle, unremarkable in looks, blinking fearfully into the world. He told me his name was Ur. I didn't ask him how he knew that, I guess he just did.

"I'm The Egg That Hatched Next To Pewee," I said.

"Long name."

"Call me Broken Shell," I said.

He nodded. I told him everything Pewee had told me. His fearful eye turned to liquid laughter. Sounds like unconnected musical notes came out of his rubbery mouth. That shocked me! I had never heard a Kridle laugh before. I knew instinctively, however, that he was laughing. It was as though somewhere or somehow Ur had touched a memory of a laugh in my ancestry.

"What are you laughing at, Ur?"

Truth was, I thought if he told me I might also get the opportunity to have a laugh. My first!

"What you said about the spear and those guys who call themselves Flyers. Why, my little spear is all ready to go!"

"What are you saying?"

He looked at me. I'd been mistaken. He had no fear, just a laugh and I'd never seen or heard one before.

"I ain't eating you, Broken Shell, and I ain't eating no old bloated Kridle, so I'm gonna chuck this little javelin at the first Flyer that crosses my path and abuses my vision."

I shook my head sadly, "You'll die!" I thought I was beginning to sound like Pewee. Ur laughed.

"What are you laughing at?"

No answer from Ur. He just kept on laughing. It rolled out of him in irresistible waves of strange music. Just when I thought it had an established beat it changed and somehow became even more funny. I smiled at the curiousness of it. Then I heard a little chuckle unhitch itself from somewhere in my belly. It tasted better than any broken shell or piece of Pewee. I felt the chuckle expanding into a laugh. Then I was laughing. Laughing like a Kridle. Our laughter wobbled up and down Glass Avenue. I saw the jelly eyes of the other Kridles turning to us in unbelieving stares. We threw caution to the wind and stood up on our arthritic limbs like begging bears or walking wooden armchairs. I felt the spear loose in my back and laughter like sap oozing through my body. I'd never felt so free and strange in all my life. And the more I laughed, the more I laughed. I was standing up next to Ur. I heard with amazement the murmur of chuckles amongst a group of newly hatched Kridles.

"We're giving it to them," said Ur. "Pretty soon they'll be born laughing."

I stopped laughing. I felt some dark invaders had entered my mind and strangled my laugh. I peered through the twilight and heard the sound of the Flyers, the sound of dread, the death drone. They filled the ether with a roar that made the planet shake and the great buildings quiver. Eggs broke and Kridles came into the world, laughing, infected with this crazy thing Ur had started. For perhaps the first

time in the history of the Kridles, certainly for the first time in my short life, laughter played like fountains in the gloom of Glass Avenue. The drone grew louder. A window shattered. I saw in the distance the sky was deep and dark with Flyers. They were moving in a V formation, not at great speed, but heavy and slow, as though like tractors of the sky that knew when it was time to dig a field and turn the earth. I could see their naked pink throats, soft and vulnerable. I felt the spear in my back and the trigger rib. On such a day as this it would not be bad to die. Life had always held little enough for a Kridle. I glanced at Ur. He was standing up. His spear was in position . . . and all around him! Amazing to see! Kridles were standing, old and young, struggling to their feet. Young Kridles were born with a laugh on their lips and a spear in their backs. Older Kridles were turning their backs as though to oil their insides, free themselves of rust and make ready as best they could the spear they had carried so long. And above all this movement and strange activity there was always the drone of the Flyers and the knowledge of death. Ur looked over at me and I saw his eyes were half hooded. He might have been laughing or calculating. The Flyers were nearly on us now. I felt surprisingly calm, my last and real concern now: not my life but the accuracy of my trajectory.

Ur's voice rang out above the drone of death:

"Don't fire until you can see the pink of their throats."

I think he was laughing even as he spoke. His voice was picked up and instantly passed down and up the Avenue. Then the Flyers were low and above us. The sky was a dark triangle, the pinks of their throats a vague luminous target. Ur's voice rang out, amazingly audible even beneath the drone.

"Fire! Fire now!"

We spat our spears. The might of the nation of Kridles! They flew upward in a black cloud of the deadliest rain. I followed mine up and into the soft pink centre of a Flyer's throat. I saw him twisting and turning, trying to shake it out but it had struck home and true. His eyes rolled. He turned over and over and out of control crashed through a building sending glass and debris flying out into what was now a battle zone. And eggs continued to hatch and spears to fly, now singly, now in angry squalls from unexpected places where Kridles had been hidden and survived.

Beside me Ur was still smiling. No sound of laughter came from him now. His body was impaled on the end of a dying Flyer's bill. I sank back exhausted to await my death: I had released my spear and now I would die. But inside my body there was no agony. All around me was chaos and confusion and death but I was at peace. I could do no more. I had done what I could. Buildings were pouring with smoke. Flyers were crashing to the ground, ploughing through the Kridles who could not move fast enough to points of safety. And where was safety after the spear was gone and the battle joined? Death was no stranger in the life of a Kridle. That day many Kridles were killed as they were born by crashing Flyers. Many would never see the darkness outside of their shells. . . .

. . . and through it all, my spear gone, I felt only peace and the tender lips of the scar grooves in the hoops of my back. I was filled with the thought that, incredible as it seemed, I wasn't dying. I was exhausted. I was panting. But surely this was not death?

The Flyers were defeated. The fighting formation broken and destroyed. Those who had not been struck by spears were leaderless, wild, out of control and lost. They sank in crazy spirals, whining, dropping, bursting into many parts, breathing no more.

And I was still breathing. I wasn't dying. Pewee had been wrong. The Kridles had been wrong. Ur had known something. Poor Ur. I ducked nimbly behind the gutted entrails of a slave machine as a Flyer churned over me and broke his bill on a shard of wall. I was moving. I was still moving. I didn't want to die and I didn't feel I was dying. The scar grooves on my back. Something strange was happening there. They were tender as wounds and moist as mouths. Were there tongues inside my body, dabbing lips as though to make words that would fly out over this waste of death and chaos? I turned and squirmed. I was wrong. They were not words that were growing out of mouths but wings. I felt them now, pushing out of the scar grooves, out of the wounds, opening and secreting with unknown moistures. I moved slightly off the ground, feeling a new power in my back, a new strength. And all around me now, through the stench of death and the smoking ruins of the battle zone, I saw wings sprouting from the backs of fluttering Kridles. And beauty! The first magnificent Kridle was in full flight, high above us, waiting for the rest of us. From the back of the Kridle, wings such as I was growing, sprouted in dazzling canvases of color. There, a part of the wing was like a stained glass window, which in its movement showed many stories from the past and many that had yet to be told and seen on other worlds, far away. And here was a panel that showed the dazzle of gold, the smoke of blue, the homage of purple, the dawn of crimson . . . kaleidoscopes of history unfolding. Words to describe struggled from my mouth, while wings to fly struggled from my back. Then with the first wave of Kridles I was away, ten thousand of us, glorious in flight, an army of galactic butterflies, undisciplined in beauty, moving through space.

So I was born!

Philip Sidney Jennings

Bulge baby, born 1945, September. I remember ration coupons. Went to school, grammar school in Hastings, Sussex, South East England. Found myself becoming a stoic prisoner in what seemed like a joyless system. Academically successful. Relieved to get away to London, Enfield College, Middlesex. B.A. degree and a post-graduate in Education. Taught for two years in East end of London (tough). 1971-1973 two-year contract in Jamaica, West-Indies — still a teacher. Found the 'giving' part of teaching and the 'personal performance' bit exhausting. Went to New York after Jamaica and some travels in Central America and Mexico. 1973-1977 — in retrospect it seems I walked the streets of Manhattan for four years without a work permit. Was a shop assistant (liquor and books), mini diplomat in U.K. Mission to U.N., Times Square pamphleteer, busboy in nightclubs, dishwasher, waiter — the list is endless and known. Also student, M.A.

in Creative Writing, City College, New York, tutor: Joseph Heller. Thesis: 'The Inner Space Tapes'. Left New York, 1977, back in London again for last three years. Still odd jobbing and free lancing. I love the short story form and center on this although it is the most difficult to find homes for. Couldn't stop writing them even if I wanted to, which I don't.

I'm interested in 'missing links' — the point where analysis stops and things wander into worlds of magic and perhaps. Written five full length books, none of them published, deemed 'not commercial enough' but were well liked by those who read them.

Single. Live alone and treasure my friends.

Two-hundred-thousand up front, two million in operating money and half a million when I get it done . . .

As soon as I read the consultant's report, I knew this job was going to be a mean one.

For one thing, the very fact that there was a consultant's report meant that the company's own people had been able to do nothing with it. In some companies, that doesn't mean very much because the in-house people are such jerks. But Colonies General had the best — like Andrews, the head of their Engineering Department. And obviously Andrews' people had screwed it up good.

I knew that because McCarver didn't make Colonies General the biggest outfit in this sector by playing loose with company money. He hated like hell to pay out what that report must have cost him and I would bet there were a few people sweating right now in Engineering.

But the clincher was the conclusion of the report. "Simple in principle," they said, "but impossible with present technology."

When an expert, especially a high-priced expert, tells you that something is "simple in principle," you better rush to lay down your last credit and your ticket home that your "expert" doesn't have the slightest idea how to solve your problem. But of course he can't say that, so he dreams up a solution he knows to be utterly impractical, tells you he's solved it "in principle" but after all he isn't responsible for the missing technology, and sends you a big bill very fast.

It was the "impossible" that made up my mind. An expert's "impossible" is always a good sign. To me it means a good fee, some fun, and a better than even chance of success. Superstition, maybe.

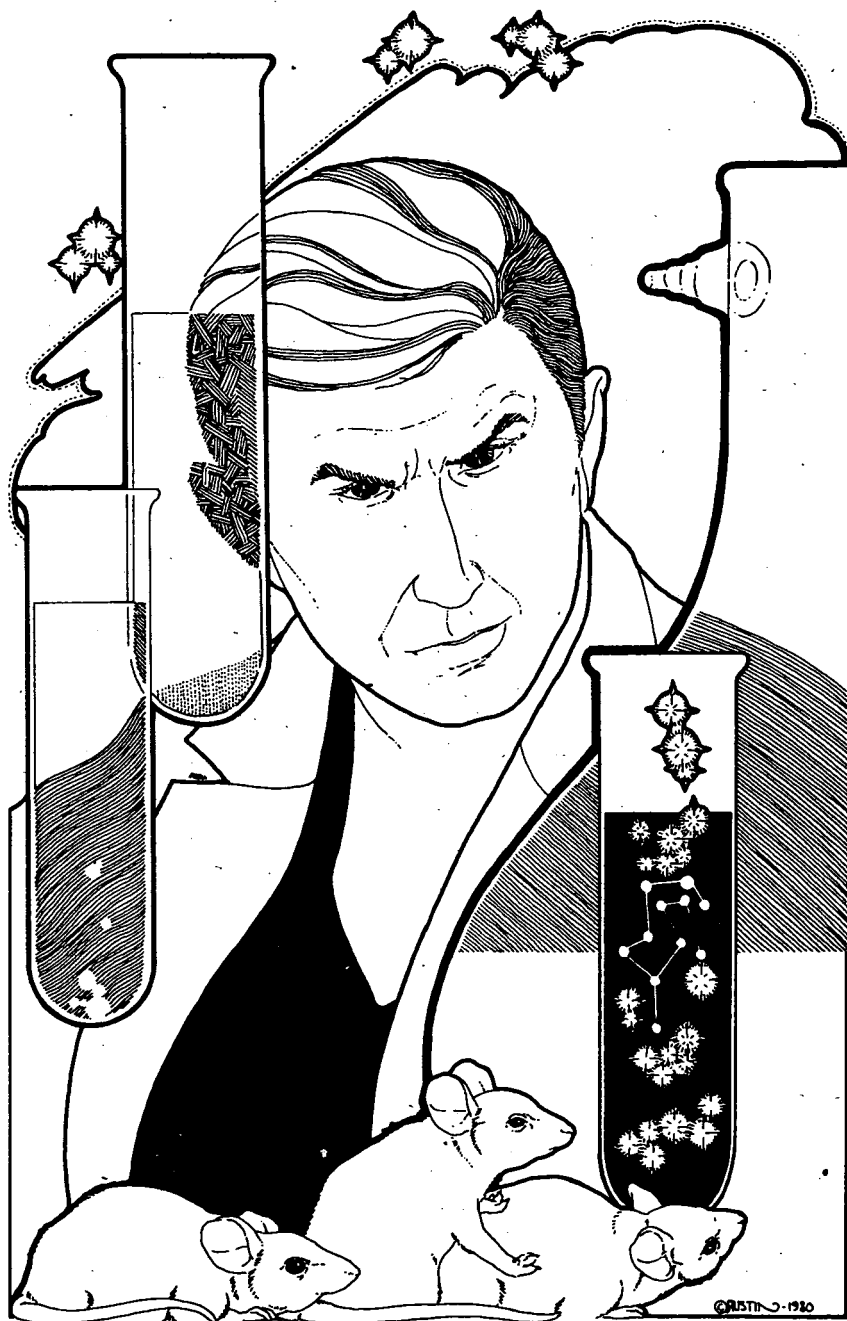
So I went down and rang up McCarver. The old son of a bitch hadn't changed in five years and I still wished I knew where he got cigars out in this sector.

"What do you think? Can you do it?" McCarver was tight with words, too.

"I'll give it a shot. Two-hundred-thousand up front, two million in operating money and half a million if I get it done. I'll need a lab on the spot. And you pay my carfare home if I blow it."

I thought McCarver was going to swallow his cigar lengthwise. Which was just the reaction I wanted. When you first start out freelancing you've got to set your price high because no one will believe you're worth a damn if you come cheap. If you manage to produce once or twice, then you're worth the big fee and the word gets around soon enough. But the numbers I gave McCarver were outrageous and I knew it. I wanted him to know I thought this would be a tough one and I wanted to know how badly he needed it done. Besides, I figure he gets paid to get apoplectic.

Lewis Jacobson **project** **purple**



Illustrated by Alicia Austin

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"You pay your own damn carfare home if you blow it," McCarver bellowed. "And for that kind of money you'd better not blow it."

Only a token quibble. He must need this one. "Standard escape clause?"

"Yes. Okay, okay. Now get to it!"

"What about my lab?"

"Andrews' clowns left enough hardware onsite to keep the lab equipment companies in the black for a decade. Make do."

McCarver could be really heartbreaking. The only equipment supplier in the sector was one that McCarver had sold when he took over Colonies General. Sold for one credit. To his wife.

"Okay, I'll be in touch," I said. "Send a boat to get me."

McCarver faded out without another word.

I heard later that the Poseidon system was quite a beautiful sight from space. But as I sat in the bouncing little boat going in I never saw it. I was already tuned entirely in to the problem.

Poseidon 3 was a pretty little planet with more Niobium on it than had any natural right to be in one place. The whole place was worth its weight in — well, Niobium. A claim had been staked and now the mining company was ready to get in there and dig it out. Only trouble was, there was no way to get it out. Poseidon itself put out so much variable RF noise that using robot miners was impossible. They kept going crazy and no one had yet figured out when they would go crazy or for how long. So it had to be human miners.

And there was the problem. This little beauty had nothing but CO₂ and Nitrogen on it to breathe, was covered with corrosive salt water and blew up storms that would crush anything you could float. To top it all off, there was some kind of parasite that went crazy as soon as it found some oxygen to get drunk on. The first group of mining engineers, put down in a floating shell filled with oxygen, had not lasted a month. The parasites had got to them just before one of those lovely storms stomped on their little shell.

So they had called in Colonies General. Build us a colony, they said.

The answer, of course, was that you had to change the humans to fit the environment. That was the major technical step of the last two centuries. Rather than trying to build cocoons around the human organism, adapted by its evolution to an environment which was rarely found off its home planet, it was sometimes simpler to build a new organism. Well, almost new. We still had to use the original brain and all the connections which had evolved to feed it nutrients and information and take its outputs. We could mess around with human biochemistry — more every year, it seemed — but we had to keep the basic structure.

Andrews had tried all the obvious routes. A resistance factor against the parasite, a new hemoglobin which would allow survival in minute oxygen tensions and so forth. None of it had worked.

The resistance factor against the parasite had somehow been incompatible with kidney function. The low oxygen idea was a good one, but for some reason that no one had yet doped out the volunteers with the mutant hemoglobin had developed extremely painful and inconvenient cases of satyriasis and none of them had agreed to have the relevant nerves cut. Understandably.

It seemed to me that I had to think bigger. If it was going to be so hard to keep humans in oxygen, why not fix it so they didn't need oxygen? All I had to do was rig the physiology of my new humans so they could use something else at the ends of their electron transport chains. Lots of bacteria did, after all. Sulfate, nitrate, even CO₂ — anything that would latch onto electrons would do, so long

as the end-product wasn't too nasty. There was really no sound chemical reason for humans to use oxygen at all, except that their ancestors for several billion years back to the first amoebae with ambition had all done it that way. And the end-product — water — was easy to live with.

But no matter. Let's see: If we rigged it so nitrate was reduced to nitrite. . . No, that would never work. Too many things could go wrong with nitrites running around in a human body. No way of excreting it efficiently and anyway, how the hell would we get enough nitrate in? Lungs just hadn't evolved to do that job. Sulfate, same problem.

Hey, what about water breathing? That might work, and living underwater would avoid those storms, eliminating another hazard in the bargain. I began to visualize various fishlike modifications of the human anatomy. If we could arrest development at the protogill stage and somehow induce maturation into normal gills and then. . . Nope, no good. They needed miners *now* and couldn't wait while I messed around with modified embryology. But as my aquamen swam around in my mind, an idea began to take shape.

Living underwater clearly had its advantages on Poseidon 3, but getting oxygen from the water was going to mean too much messing around. So let's dispense with oxygen entirely. Now what creatures had already solved this problem? Lots of water to work with, minimal oxygen, lots of CO₂ — what did that sound like? Photosynthetic anaerobes, that's what! Hmm.

That was it. Do away with the massive need for electron acceptors for oxidative metabolism. Use it all to reduce CO₂ to sugars, getting your electrons from water by light energy, run a noncyclic photophosphorylation in parallel for extra energy and there you had it. Not only did you not need oxygen but you eliminated the need for food — or most food — as a bonus. Your new photosynthetic man would be making his own food from water and CO₂ and God knew that Poseidon 3 had enough of both to go around. A human plant might make it.

By the time my boat docked at the orbiting station around Poseidon 3 I had the whole idea mapped out in my mind. Of course it had never been done, but it was simple in principle. It never occurred to me that I had lately finished sneering at those same words from McCarver's hired experts.

My first shock came when I went to the lab. I was humming right along, my brain was in overdrive, I was ready to start cutting and splicing. And there was Samantha Andrews, waiting for me. Hopping mad she was, too.

"How much did you soak McCarver for this time, you haploid nincompoop?" she demanded, eyes flashing.

It had been a few years since I'd seen her and I'd half forgotten what a looker she was. I was so startled by the reminder, and by her unexpected presence, that I almost forgot to be conciliatory. Almost.

"Now, Sammy, I can understand why you're upset. It's only natural for you to feel insulted when McCarver has to call in outsiders. And I can certainly see why you should resent the fees I get. But I'm really happy I caught you here before you left. It's been a long time, Sammy." I gave her what I thought of as my most winning smile, hoping that she hadn't heard what I got McCarver to agree to. That would really burn her up.

"What do you mean, 'before I left,' you son of a bitch? And don't patronize me. McCarver wanted me to look over your shoulder to protect his 'investment'," she said, her voice fair dripping with sarcasm. "I thought I should be honored to have the chance to watch Mitchell the Great Hired Gun at work."

Well, so much for that, I thought. She knew and she was planning to take every last credit out of my hide. McCarver must have rubbed her pretty little nose in it.

Nothing for it now but to be businesslike until the storm blew by.

"Okay, Sammy. Sorry you feel that way, but I do understand. Now let's bury it and get the job done. What I had in mind was . . ."

So we got to it. I figured to start with a plant instead of alga, since its messenger had been set up to get through a nuclear membrane. We pulled out some DNA, chopped it and shotgun cloned it onto a plasmid vector, propagated and pulled out a bunch of good photosystem producers with a monoclonal antibody screen. We picked through those, throwing out the small partials, then pulled together a few big partials onto one plasmid and checked that out for a full functioning photosystem. Everything was going smooth as could be. This stuff was all classical.

It was all going so well that I decided to take a shot at the lucky break. We chopped our plasmid, pulled out the big photosystem piece and sewed it right into a C-type virus, with a mouse vector modification stitched in for good measure.

Through it all Sammy stayed cool, watching, helping when I needed help. It wasn't that she was belligerent, not at all. She wasn't critical, stopped being sarcastic and was as cooperative as you could ask. It's just that you could have run a cryostat off her.

So we pumped our modified C-type into a mouse and sure enough the mouse turned green. A beautiful, satisfying shade of green. Then we dumped him into an aquarium and although it ruffled him a bit, he seemed to get used to it. When we ran in the water and pumped out the air I got the distinct feeling that Sammy was hovering over the whole thing, hoping like hell that I'd blown it somehow. I think she *wanted* that mouse to drown.

But he didn't. In fact, he took to it like the bastard son of a seasnake. The little bugger went swimming around underwater as if nothing had happened. I popped a tracer in his tank and he was lapping up CO₂ like he was born to it.

For a few hours there I really thought we had it licked.

"Terrific, Hotshot," she said, cool as ever. "This will do wonders for anyone with a green cheese surplus. But let's see how well you've really done. I have some parasite cultures in cold storage."

She had a point, you know. We thawed out her parasite cultures, which had been put up in her usual meticulous style, and shot a bit into our mouse's tank. Nothing happened. But I wasn't going to risk that chill from her again, no sir.

"What do you think, Sammy?" I said. "You've seen this parasite more than I have."

"Let's let things go overnight," she said. "See you in the morning."

But this was all diplomacy. I was convinced we had it home. I went off and slept like a baby, for the first time since we had started.

When I walked into the lab in the morning, I could tell from the not-quite-concealed look of triumph on Sammy's face that something had happened.

Sure enough, a dead and drifting green mouse is not as pretty as a live and swimming green mouse.

"What do you make of it?" I asked, letting my disappointment show.

"Simple, really," she said, with a smile that would have solidified a tank of liquid nitrogen. "What do you get when you split those electrons off from water in your photosystem?"

"Oh," I said. "Oxygen."

"Yup, oxygen. Just enough, apparently, to let the Poseidon parasite get a slow but obviously sure hold on your mouse. Or on your green miners."

Damn her, she was enjoying this. But I didn't give up, not immediately. I figured maybe if we wrapped our photosystem up in a membrane something like

a chloroplast we might get away with it. So we cloned up a modified chloroplast membrane and stuck in our C-type. Then we ran signal sequences on to all our photosystem genes, so they would wind up enclosed in the membrane sacs. In fact, the thing made beautiful little green vesicles in vitro and even in the next mouse. And the mouse swam around underwater just like the first mouse. And the parasite killed the second mouse just as dead, only it took a few hours longer to do it.

This time Sammy didn't even smile. She was too tired to smile and too tired to make sarcasms. Which was just as well, because I was much too tired to listen to them.

We tried a few more variations and killed a few more mice. Finally I realized we were barking up the wrong tree. I was too tired even to laugh at that. It was time to yell for help.

With Sammy trailing behind, I went to Communications and rang up McCarver again.

"Well?" he said, tilting his cigar upward ten belligerent degrees.

"I need Hastings," I said, "and I need him now."

"Hastings? Will he cooperate?"

"I know, I know. I don't like the supercilious bastard either. But I don't have to love him. He's a dinkum gene jockey and I need him."

"You deserve him. You've got him." McCarver said, and rang off.

As I turned away, I really expected to catch it from Sammy. But all she said was "Hastings? Mitch, you've got to be kidding."

"Sammy, love, would I kid about a thing like that?" Somehow, impending events had already drawn us closer.

But neither of us was really prepared for what happened when the boat delivered Hastings the next day. We were waiting in the port, not looking forward to this at all. We had figured that giving him as warm a greeting as we could manage might tilt him over toward behaving like a human being.

The port opened and in walked Hastings, arm in arm with a blonde that towered over him at least 25 centimeters. And what a blonde! The creature made this year's Starlet Harlot look like last year's Miss Wasteproduct. Dressed in about 3 cubic meters of pink froth with a net opacity of zero. I think my body switched all its efforts over to sensory inputs and hormone production and my jaw went dead slack from lack of attention.

But Sammy was right with it. "Who the hell is this?" she demanded.

"My dears!" Hastings effused, "how very kind of you to greet me so cordially. Allow me to introduce my assistant, Monique. Monique, you have of course read my dossiers on our colleagues."

"Your assistant?" Sammy said. I think she had it in mind to say something more, but her jaw went slack just like mine. Except in her case, I doubt it was hormone overload.

"Of course, my dear," said Hastings, "Didn't McCarver inform you? Well, no matter, I'm sure Monique and I will be able to straighten things out for you. Provided, of course, that you've kept careful notes on your previous missteps?"

That snapped me out of it. "You'll find our records in the lab. Help yourself and we'll talk later. C'mon, Sammy, let's get a drink before we get back to work."

"Uh-huh." Sammy said, evidently still a bit dazed. Even when you've anticipated it, you never really expect it.

We returned to the lab a couple of hours later, hoping we had anaesthetized ourselves enough. In fact, I was feeling much better. At least Sammy was too

preoccupied to be mad at me anymore.

Hastings looked up as we came in. Monique was trying to catch her reflection in a flask or something.

"I must hand it to you, Mitchell," Hastings said. "This idea is not half bad. Not half bad at all. Of course, one *might* have anticipated the effect of oxygen release at the photosystem center. Indeed, I must in honesty say that one *should* have anticipated it from the outset. But, all in all, not a bad try. I should think your green mice must have been rather droll."

I decided that I had to reassert control right now before it all got away from me. "Cut the crap, Hastings, what have you got in mind?"

"Have you ever heard of the nonsulfur purple bacteria, Mitchell?" Even when contributing a good idea, Hastings could be condescending.

"Of course I have. There's not much done with them anymore but they . . . Hey! That just might work. Aren't they the ones that. . ."

"I'm sure," Hastings cut in, "that even you can see the obvious advantages once I have pointed them out to you. Photosynthesis, yes, but using light from a region of the spectrum which much more closely matches what's available on Poseidon 3. And the key, of course, is lactic acid. These little darlings can use light energy to split electrons from lactic acid instead of water and what you get is not oxygen, which you have so elegantly proven to be intolerable, but only pyruvic acid. In other words," adding a totally unnecessary flourish, "you are simply running the normal pyruvic-lactic conversion of human muscle in reverse. Not only do you get your electrons, but you drain the miners' muscles of all that lactic acid. No fatigue, my dears. An elegant solution, don't you think?"

If I had nothing to say at that point, it was because I was running the biochemical accounting of it through my head.

"Hmm," Sammy said, "it *feels* uncomfortable. Sort of like a perpetual motion machine."

"Of course it is nothing of the kind." Hastings said, more than slightly irked at the slow response he was getting. "There is a continuous input of driving energy in the form of light."

"That's not what I meant," Sammy said. "It just feels funny."

"It does. But it balances out right," I said, having completed my mental run through the processes. "It's just a closed-cycle chemical engine. You break down glucose to lactic acid, use lactic acid to reduce CO₂, getting back some of your glucose by the Calvin-Bassham Cycle. The rest of your lactic acid gets oxidized to supply the CO₂ and your spend some electrons back making new glucose. It sure seems to add up."

Hastings was getting to look even more smug, if that were possible. "Have you spotted any loose oxygen?" he asked, as if he were expecting a first-year engineering student to have made obvious and embarrassing error.

I looked at Sammy and she looked back at me. Our eyes met and the message passed between us: The son of a bitch is right. No oxygen.

"Okay," I said, suppressing my discomfort and reaching a decision, "Let's get to it. Sammy, pull out some nonsulfur purples from cold storage. Hastings, you and, er, Monique lay out a route for getting the right pieces. I want to rethink the vector problem and see if we've overlooked anything."

So we started again, cutting, splicing, cloning, selecting. Some of the selections turned out to be a bit tricky, since the gene products had not been anywhere near as well characterized as those from green plants. We had to start up a few monoclonal antibodies that nobody had ever bothered to make before. But it seemed to be running smoothly.

During a lull on our third day of continuous work, Sammy and I found ourselves alone for a few seconds. "Mitch," she said, "about the way I acted when we started out. . ."

"Skip it, Sammy. I said I understood and I did. When you freelance like I do it seems to happen almost every job. I've gotten used to it."

"That's not quite what I meant, Mitch. I probably wouldn't have been so put out if it were anyone but you. We weren't exactly strangers interacting on a purely professional level."

"No, we weren't strangers. We could never be strangers." We moved closer and I reached out, held her hands. All the old feeling between us seemed to return in an instant, as if nothing had happened in the last five years.

As we moved closer, our eyes locked together, Monique burst into the lab.

"It looks like we've got the photosystem going. That is, he thinks we have. Would you like to come and see the data?"

The moment was gone. Sammy released my hands and shot Monique a look on a special wavelength used only between females.

"Yes, let's look," she said.

So we went and Sammy and I pored over the data while Hastings paced behind us like a nervous father, occasionally peering over our shoulder.

Finally I said, "It looks okay to me."

But we quibbled and we argued. Sammy and I raised every possible strawman alternative we could think of. Hastings seemed to have the answers ready. We quizzed him about every step of his assay procedure, referring back to the data, dissecting, questioning, on and on. As we went on, Sammy seemed to become convinced and joined Hastings in rebutting my counter-proposals. Not that I minded. I wanted everything examined as carefully as possible.

When we had been at this for eight or nine hours I finally called a halt. "All right. It holds water, or if it doesn't, we can't spot the problem. Let's set up the next set of screens."

After twelve more hours I could sense that we were all getting a bit punchy. I know I was. The animal scent that Monique was exuding was beginning to get to me again, but I realized I was too tired to get anything but irritated.

"It's all set up and going. Everybody break for twelve hours of sleep, before we start making stupid mistakes."

I wobbled off, too tired to think of eating. I hadn't realized how far gone I was until we stopped. Without stopping to undress, I dove for my bunk as I had once done in erotic teenage freefall dreams. I was out before I hit.

I was awakened by a tapping at my cabin door. My first impression was that I had been dreaming about that tapping for an hour or so before it woke me. A bit disoriented, I looked at the chrono. I had been asleep for ten hours.

Still groggy, I opened the door. And in flowed Monique, preceded, accompanied and trailed by a scent that could only have been the long-sought human sex pheromone. She was wearing something skin-tight. At least, I think she was wearing something.

"Oh, Mitch," she breathed. "Did I wake you? I hope not. I did want to find some time to get to know you and you keep us all working so hard."

"Uh, no, uh, you didn't wake me." Maybe I wasn't awake yet.

"Have you a drink or something? I don't want you to think I was complaining about the work. It's such a *privilege* to work with a scientist like you. You are very famous, you know."

"I'm no scientist. Just an engineer doing a job of engineering," I said. My words sounded so stupid to me that I moved to pour a drink, barely remembering to

pour one for her, too.

"You're not like Hastings, though, Mitch. He can be so, well so sort of distant when he's working. Don't you think so?"

I didn't know what to say to that. My head was still hopelessly muzzy. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable too, because I wanted to sit down and Monique had draped herself on my bunk. I was sure my bunk would never smell the same again.

"Come sit by me, please, Mitch." She seemed to contract a few miscellaneous but well-selected muscles.

I was in danger of being overwhelmed. But don't ask me why I wasn't, because to this day I'm not sure. Maybe I was thinking of Sammy, maybe not. Maybe I was thinking about what close quarters these orbiting lab stations were. Maybe I was still asleep. Maybe I was just born dumb.

What came out of my mouth was, "Go away, Monique. I still need about four days' sleep and I only have two more hours to cram them into. You ought to be getting some sleep yourself."

I grabbed her hand and pulled her towards the door, opening it with my other hand and easing her out. "Some sleep, Monique," I said.

"We'll do this again, Mitch, dear?" she said from the doorway.

And as she flowed away I saw that Sammy had been standing right outside my door when it opened. Standing there in a black filmy thing that I wouldn't have believed she owned, if I hadn't remembered it all too well. Standing there now with a look that would make a Hephaestian fire lizard wither and die.

Sammy did an about-face and stalked off. By the time she had turned the corner about twenty sets of lame phrases had flashed through my mind and not one had come anywhere near being uttered.

I turned, latched my door in limp defeat and tried to go back to sleep.

When I returned to the lab they were all there, already hard at work. Sammy never said a word, and her face was impassive. When she looked at me it was as if I was part of the furniture. I never really came close to saying anything as stupid as 'Sammy, let me explain' although that and many more elaborate versions came to mind.

Hastings called me over to discuss something and soon I was preoccupied.

We were trying to work up the Calvin-Bassham enzymes on plasmids, which in itself was not too difficult, but we were having to throw in some fancy control mechanisms which were never meant to be there. Of course, those enzymes were never made to coexist with human muscle metabolism, either. It was very exacting, tedious work. Two or three times we thought we had it only to find that the system overreacted to the control substance.

So we tried it again and again, each time with a minor variation. The problem was that we were running blind. We were building a great big black box full on enzymes and all we knew was that the system should cycle properly without running into bottlenecks so that one intermediate substance accumulated to excess and gummed up the works. What we didn't know was how to build the system to achieve that kind of stability. It was like trying to balance a mechanical device on a knife-edge without knowing anything about the internal moving parts and how far off center each one needed to operate. All we could do was make a seat-of-the-pants guess, try it, see where it went wrong and try to push it back into place. But when we pushed, something else kept falling out of place.

It was hard enough without Hastings anointing every one of his seat-of-the-pants guesses as a 'brilliant intuition.' And those anointings were hard enough without Monique cooing over them.

The biochemical pushing and shoving dragged on into its third day. I was getting frustrated and irritable because it always seemed so close, yet it never seemed to quite work out.

I was so absorbed in the whole thing that I was quite startled when Sammy suddenly appeared in the lab, dressed for travel.

"The boat is here now, Mitch. I'll be going in a few minutes."

"Huh? What do you mean, going?"

"I'm leaving, Mitch. The boat is here to pick me up." All this in a tone as if she were leaving a return message with her communications computer.

"But. . . What about McCarver? Does he. . ."

"I invoked my escape clause. Quit. I'm going home."

I suppose I should have known it was coming. I suppose I *should have* a lot of things, all of which occurred to me again, and again remained unsaid.

I wanted to say 'Let's discuss this, Sammy' or 'What about all we've been through together?' or 'You can't leave me here with these two.' But I knew as well as she did that her invocation of her escape clause was irrevocable. So all I said was, "Good luck, Sammy. I'll miss you."

She looked at me for a moment, turned and left.

As I watched her go, Monique came up behind me, put a hand on my shoulder and said, "Mitch, can you come look at this newest clone? He says it looks promising."

I shrugged off her hand and went to look at the new clone. I hardly noticed the little jolt when Sammy's boat left the station.

Hastings' new clone was, indeed, promising. It promised more than it delivered, however, because on the twelfth test we tried the whole system went into wild oscillations.

By sheer number of trials, we had by now a good idea of what was wrong. We spliced in one more regulator, a multivalent feedback, and re-cloned the modified stuff. And this time it worked. It continued to work no matter what we threw at it.

So we now had the photosystem, the energy generator itself, going to satisfaction and the super-regulated dark reactions were in place. The next step was to put the pieces together.

I thought we ought to be taking this in small steps from here out. The cloned photosynthesis system was complicated enough in itself and putting it in with the biochemistry of a human muscle was going to increase the complexity enormously.

"Let's put the two pieces together on a plasmid and run them into a minicell or something," I suggested. "Just to see if they function right."

But Hastings was for making the grand leap. "My dear Mitch, must you persist in such timidity? I can stitch those pieces right onto a C-type vector, even one as crude as the one you made, and have the whole system running in a mouse by tomorrow."

I was too tired by now to argue. Besides, if he was right it would save us several steps and a lot of time. I was anxious to have this business over with. So in the end I gave in and let him try it.

Even then, it was not as simple as he had thought. It took three tries before he had the thing on a C-type. Then we shot it into a mouse and the mouse, as planned, slowly began to turn purple. Everything was looking so right, in fact, that I called a sleep break of twelve hours to let the thing express fully before we tested the mouse out.

I went to my cabin, bolted the door, took a long spell in the needle bath and

then put the silencer on the door before I dropped off. For twelve hours, I dreamed of Sammy.

When we got back to the lab, our purple mouse was very gruesomely dead. Hastings, as usual, had a ready explanation.

"You must have left something extraneous on that virus vector," he said. "I'm quite certain there was nothing wrong with my construction."

"There wasn't so much as one extra ring on that vector, and you know it," I said. "You've seen the records of our green mice. They were perfectly stable against anything but the parasite. There couldn't have been anything wrong with the vector."

"Perhaps you'd best examine your records again, Mitchell. Besides, wasn't it Andrews who ran the tests on the vector you made? Are you sure those tests were, uh, dependable?"

"As dependable as death and inflation, you son of a bitch." I was finally beginning to get disgusted with his smugness. And I didn't like his questioning Sammy's competence that way.

"Are you sure your judgement is quite, shall we say, *objective*, where those data are concerned?"

"Look, Hastings, I've taken about all I'm going to from you. The 'brilliant intuitions' you were so sure of have screwed this up, not the vector. Now we go back and do it my way. We put that plasmid into a bacterial host and make sure, damned sure, that it functions right before we get ahead of ourselves again. Am I making myself clear?"

"If you must insist, Mitchell, on trying to pursue every goal in the most pedestrian manner. I did agree with McCarver to accede to your authority, misplaced though it might have been. Very well, we will do it the slow, boring way."

So we put the thing into a simple bacterium. Sure enough, it too turned purple and before long the little bugs were photosynthesizing perfectly. In fact, they were doing it better than the bacterium from which we had grabbed the genes to begin with. Something in the extra regulators were increasing the efficiency of the process, although they hadn't really been designed to do that. I didn't understand it, and Hastings admitted he didn't either. But he didn't lose a second in pointing out that the perfect function we were seeing meant that our original cloning job had been, if anything, even better than we thought, and that its success in the bacterium only meant that we still didn't know why it had killed the mouse.

Hastings was still convinced that something was wrong with the vector, so he set off to make his own modified C-type virus. Having satisfied himself, he again tried to stitch our photosynthesis system into it. To a gene jockey it looked perfect. To a mouse it was pure death.

So I tried it again, and Hastings tried it again. Twice, three times, ten times. Minor modifications, singly and in combination. Always the same result. What was the old saw about synthesizing better mouse poison?

Finally, I had had enough. Hastings, Monique and I sat down, reviewed all the steps right from the beginning. It looked beautiful, on paper. But it killed mice and we couldn't clearly see why.

"That's it," I said. "Enough. It seems pretty clear to me that we've left out some little signal sequence or regulator that's important to a mouse, but not to a bacterium. It could be in any one of the dozens of genes we've put in there. A plodder like me might take months to find the right bit. No doubt you will intuit the right answer almost immediately. I'm getting out."

I was disgusted, all right. I called McCarver.

When he saw that it was me, he raised one eyebrow. "Well?"

"Sorry, McCarver. Close, but no cigar."

I could see that my phrase irked him, as I intended. But all he said was, "So?"

"So I'm invoking my escape clause. Send a boat."

"My report?" he said, referring to the provision in my standard escape clause.

"Copy to the pilot, copy to the station computer, copy to my successor, which I assume will be Hastings. Letter of the law."

"You're relieved," he said, completing the formalities, and rang off.

Vintage McCarver, I thought, as he faded. Six words. He would probably be upset that he hadn't managed with five.

In the two days it took the boat to arrive, I stayed in my cabin, sealed up. I caught up on sleep and when I felt refreshed, at least somewhat, I sat and wrote the required report. I put it all in, outlining the whole route, false trails and all. I made special mention of the nice work Sammy had done, not regarding this as any sort of generosity, but only the truth. It wouldn't hurt her if she ever wanted her job back with Colonies General.

I also pointed out that the new purple photosynthetic bacterium we had made had very clear commercial possibilities, given the right kind of situation. For certain kinds of agricultural uses, it was clearly superior to anything then in existence. I also pointed out that, in my professional opinion, it would qualify for patent and licensing under existing regs. If McCarver played it just right, he stood to make a bundle off our failures. Maybe that would compensate him for the sixth superfluous word.

Oh, don't get me wrong. I didn't care whether McCarver came out happy or miserable. Just good business. If I hadn't got him a Poseidon 3 colony, at least he would make back my fee and then some.

I was miserable getting off that station and miserable when I got home. For all the tidiness of my report, I hadn't liked leaving a job undone.

About the third day home, I was surprised to receive a draft for half a million credits from Colonies General. Some bookkeeping foulup, I supposed.

I called McCarver. When he appeared, smiling broadly, I said, "McCarver, about this draft..."

"Ah, Mitch, you had to have your little joke, didn't you? I must say it was carried off beautifully. Beautifully, my boy. But that purple bug of yours is an absolute marvel! We'll have that Niobium mine running on Poseidon 3 in no time at all."

"But, I..."

"Just between you and me, Mitch, I don't know if I would have had the guts to infect Hastings and his, er, assistant with that bug. But, dammit, I can't truthfully say I'm sorry you did."

"You mean...?"

"Oh, you should have seen his face when he called me! Purple with rage he was. Purple!" And McCarver guffawed. He was really enjoying himself.

"Now, business," he said, recovering. "My, uh, wife has bought the rights to that bug from Colonies General. If you want the job of taming it down for those agricultural uses you mentioned, it's yours. It's much too infectious as it is now." And he broke down into guffaws again.

"I'll let you know," I said, and rang off. I heard my door annunciator, and I recognized the code.

When I opened the door, Sammy rushed into my arms. The sweet fresh smell of her was marvellous. We kissed, and then she broke off, choking with laughter.

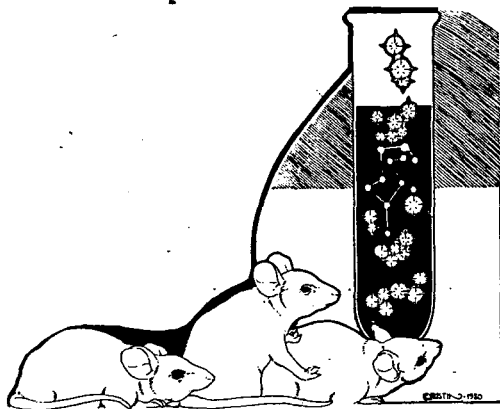
"Oh, Mitch, is she really *purple*?"

"She always was, Sammy, love. She always was." ●

Lewis Jacobson

Lewis Jacobson has been (often simultaneously, and in no particular order) a teacher, diplomat, geneticist, accountant, psychiatrist, editor, electrician, ombudsman, writer, fundraiser, plumber, gerontologist, philosopher, machinist,

microbiologist, administrator, barker, programmer, shill, biochemist and dreamer — all as part of his employment as Associate Professor of Molecular Biology at the University of Pittsburgh.



(Hope) (Ambition) (Anticipation!)

My old neighbor has this brand-new (screaming green)
Cutlass Supreme (car), see,
Had it about two weeks now;
Points it sometimes (purely by accident??)
Dead from his back yard Cutlass Supreme special park-
ing pad
In rear of his chuckling red (lucky inheriter)
(oh, my my now!) sprawly-ranch-type home
Right at my rear (third floor) (apartment) screen door;
And I have discovered
(Quite by random shot early one bleary and boozy hang-
dogged and hung-undered morning)
When he does this,
I can rock that heap, no sweat,
Just about two feet up and back in the air
Merely just by sliding my eyes (pretty fast)
Up-and-down up-and-down my fuzzy (dirt-fur!—cooking
oils! dust! lint stringers! cockroach
dabs!)

Back screen door—(efficiency! one room!)
 Now I'm practicing, see; I'm hoping
 Before too long it will be
 That on some jewel-bright steely-clear birth-of-the
 joys happy time
 Right when I first scream-shake and get up, wide awake
 (well, sort of)
 Bleary-and-blah, hurt-and-horrid, boozers-and-losers,
 (Old and cut-back, see—no new car in MY future, NAH!
 Not that I really DO want one—HAH!)
 I can dash and flip that thing smack over on its back
 The long way, just by sliding
 My eyes (pretty fast) up-and-down up-and-down
 My furry-fuzzed (old cooking soils!—bachelor-type,
 accumulative, aged-in-the-mess) back
 screen door
 (Third Floor)! (One room)! (Everything handy)! (Do it
 yourself!)
 Now, I'll hope to pull this caper (first time) see,
 Some time when he (old fat goat) (fresh-car Romeo)
 (new-home's lover boy)
 And she (young trim blonde) (eye-stopper style standard)
 (showy-faced dream package) his new
 typepopper wife!
 (She's into secretarial); (he's into gas pumping, tires,
 parts and repair—owns the place);
 (And I'm into welfare, disabled war pensions, enforced
 retirement, divorce and late-closing
 of the bars—
 JUST love every moment of it—BOO! SH__T!)
 Have fresh-finished triple-waxing that shrieking-green
 automotive mishandling of values
 And spiffing up the chrome, right the night before.
 I'll finally kerflop 'er, see, end-over-apple cart!
 Smirky emerald snout up up up upppp-uhhh (there she goes!)
 TIMBERRR!! and PLOP! tinkle-tinkle...
 (And I'll just bet she just squishes and squashes right
 down by the side of that chuckly fresh
 red home
 Like some four-wheeled overripe chrome-circled green-
 tin watermelon
 That the neighborhood kids have...) YAAAY!!!
 And then I'll feel better (a lot)—about EVERYTHING—
 I hope.

—David R. Bunch

She hobbled out into the storm, clutching
the bottle in one claw-like hand . . .

a smell of sulphur

Marvin Kaye

Wrinkling her nose at the acrid stink of sulphur she'd never learned to tolerate, the crone plucked a fatal sprig of Saluria from the crock. An ominous tremor shook her crooked spine. She deposited the poisonous herb on a cracked plate and hobbled to the window.

All morning she'd sensed the burgeoning danger. Her sister might scoff at her disquiet, but the omen was nevertheless real . . . an almost *welcome* warning. Her sibling delighted in more flamboyant magicks, but the crone knew the play and tension of opposing powers — for that and herbal grammarie comprised her most profound province of lore. She could hardly mistake the tang of foreboding stirring outward from an inimical source of strength.

Peering through the window of her hut, she scanned the bright blue skies and fields and thought spitefully of her elder sister. The lowering portent surely stemmed from her morning's labors, but if she only dared scotch her sibling's needlessly cruel scheme, the growing threat would probably dissipate.

A sudden breeze gusted a saffron patch of sulphur up her crooked nose. She sneezed. Wiping her long beak with a tattered sleeve, the crone plopped onto a low wooden stool, dismayed that even so slight an effort winded her.

The cheat of the bargain, she told herself, not for the first time. Centuries earlier, when the dark things, her masters, first whispered, she was hardly more than a child, full of vitality and hope. What did she know then of wickedness? *And now the years stretched ever on, and all action is wearisome.* . . .

The surface of the seeing-glass clouded. Dark smoke billowed within its depths; as it cleared, the loathesome visage of her sister sprang up, staring dourly out at her.

"Is it ready?" she shrilled. Her voice had a naked edge like a steel razor slicing silver. It chilled the crone, set her teeth on edge, resonated in her bones: "*Or are you dawdling, as usual?*"

Rising from the stool with difficulty, she complained, "I'm tired, and my fingers ache. The stuff still must be stirred and set out to cool."

"Be brisk, you decrepit fool! I want that potion today!"

The tremor happened again, stronger. "So you have taken the first steps?"

"Aye!" The older woman laughed, a series of terse, ear-piercing stabs. "*The King's deposed, they'll never find him! As for his brat —*" She held up a lovely sleeping infant so her sister could see her in the crystal.

"Then you've kidnapped her," the crone said, a vague, undefinable emotion stirring in her breast. "Isn't that enough? Why murder her? Our cousin agrees to work a metamorphosis to —"

"To her own purposes!" The crystal momentarily darkened; her sister was angry. "*That doddering dunderhead simply wishes to flatter her ego by having*

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royalty serve her! I'll take no chances the princess will be found and restored to the throne. She dies!"

"But not within these borders!"

"Of course not, fool! When you've prepared the potion, I'll transport her far beyond the sands and bury her at sea."

"But why? We have all we need. Till now, our sorceries have been tolerated, even overlooked. Why tempt the Fates?"

"After today, I shall be Fate in this land!"

"Yes," the crone grumbled, sourly stirring the Saluria into the mixture in the kettle, "power always was your chief weakness. Mine, knowledge."

Her sister sneered. "Regret after all these years, sister? Perhaps, then, you wish to retire? Cede me your territory, dear — I'll see you well provided for in your dotage."

Contempt welled up in the crone, her old pride. She nearly dematerialized with rage, but managed to pull herself together, sulphur exuding from her pores. (She hated the stench!)

"Cede to you? I'd sooner take service with the Red Witch!"

"Shh! Name her not!" The mere mention made her sister quail. "She suspects nothing!"

A bubbling plop. The Saluria was working up the broth. "Well, well," the crone reluctantly said, "the mixture's nearly done."

"Splendid. I'll be by in two hours to fetch it. Have it cooled and bottled."

"Don't presume to give me orders!" The crone waved a wooden spoon angrily at the face in the sphere. "It's all your fault!"

Her sister appeared genuinely puzzled. "My fault? What is?"

"That I signed the pact!"

"Dredging up ancient history, aren't we?"

"What did I know then? The dark things spoke first to you. And you tempted me."

"I don't recall needing a great deal of persuasion to get you to make up your mind."

"Everyone knows you're wickeder than I!"

"And you're inconstant! And craven!" The hag grimaced horribly. "Bah! I'll not bandy words. Cool and bottle that potion or I'll see you suffer, sister. Two hours!"

With a contemptuous sneer, she vanished. The crystal clouded, cleared and was blank once more.

All, all now was wearisome, and all because of her sister's unslakable lust for power. It was she who, long ago, seduced her innocence to the ways of the night. "All her fault," the crone muttered.

When she removed the kettle from the fire, she felt the ominous tremble along her spine yet again. Its potency had doubled since the last time she sensed it looming ever nearer. It was so strong she knew its wrathful shadow eventually would extend to her sister as well, despite her greater skills at magic.

The scheme was foolish at best, and her withered heart dared whisper it was more than that: a foulness even she could not contemplate. Enchanting the child, enslaving her . . . those were choices that could be countenanced, at least for a time, in the tacit cosmic battle. But to kill the King's sole daughter was not only difficult to accomplish, but fraught with risk.

The sensible thing to do — though it would arouse the terrible wrath of her sister — would be to pitch the poison out the back door.

Instead, the crone, smiling bleakly, set the kettle on the windowsill to cool.

Once, long ago, she *might* have refused her sister. She *could* have entered the service of the Red Witch. *Couldn't she?*

A long sigh. *No way of knowing now.* She could not alter the course of her destiny. She was proscribed to evil. And yet, she toyed with the notion of upsetting the kettle, actually reached out her hand to do so. *But I dare not! She's my sister, after all. We serve the same masters!* Her gnarled hand dropped to her side.

The skies darkened.

The pettiness of evil! How it corrodes! How it renders the years endless, all alike. Claspings her knees, she rocked miserably on the stool. *Turns and dodges, all winding down toward Eternal Entropy.*

And the smell of sulphur always offending her nose.

The wind rose. The kettle teetered on the ledge.

The old woman rose painfully to her feet and stumped to the sill, steadying the mixture lest the gale dash it on the floor. *Spill it out!*

"I can't," she protested. "She'd merely chain and torture me till I succumbed and mixed a new quantity of potion."

Spill it, spill it, do!

"I haven't the strength to resist."

That's it!

The answer had been with her all morning, niggling at her thoughts. Now it finally stood out square and plain.

"Yes," she exclaimed feebly, "yes! The only way to oppose her is — to acquiesce!"

Putting down the kettle, she scuttled feverishly to her cabinet of implements and flung wide the doors. She grasped a large empty bottle and a cork big enough to stop it.

The wind roared.

As she dipped a spoon into the kettle, she taunted the Fates. "See what I'm doing! See! All babes need their bottles. Here's one for the princess!" She ladled the poison, cackling fiendishly while the hut pitched and rocked in the hurricane's fury.

Momentary fear. But she shunted the irrelevant emotion aside and stuck the cork tight into the neck of the filled flask.

The crone donned her favorite slippers and hobbled out into the storm, clutching the bottle in one claw-like hand. The wind whipped her white hair, plucked at her spindly legs. But the sorcery of her enchanted footwear rooted her to the spot.

Now a giant cloud blotted out the straggling rays of the pallid sun. She looked up and saw the shape of her Destiny.

Resigned, yet wearily triumphant, the crone muttered, "Ah, well, I know not what may be coming but . . . let it come down . . ."

The last vestige of breeze died away. The land was calm once more. The sun sparkled on the dead hag's resplendent shoes.

A door opened in the battered remnant of what was once a rustic house and a small girl emerged holding a dog under her arm.

Dorothy, saviour of the infant ruler Ozma, wondered why such a lovely country stank so of sulphur.

Marvin Kaye

In "A Smell of Sulphur," I wanted to show the corruptible aspects of any sort of evil. In a world whose spiritual meanings have become unmoored, it is necessary to eschew evil because it is the essentially weak course of those without strength of

character. The old woman in this tale once had a chance to choose, and muffed it. There is always a choice. "The fault, dear Brutus, lies not among the stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings."

a Napkin Poem by Marv Kaye

THE BRIDGE TO THE LIVER PIES

O, you may have your rainbow
And its bright golden pot,
But if I could, I would go
Unto a place I'm not.

It was an iron bridge-way,
'Twas not much for the eyes,
But at its latter end lay
Two rabbit-liver pies.

'Twas high up in the Andes,
Five miles above the seas,
All circled round with candies
And chocolate-cherry-freeze!

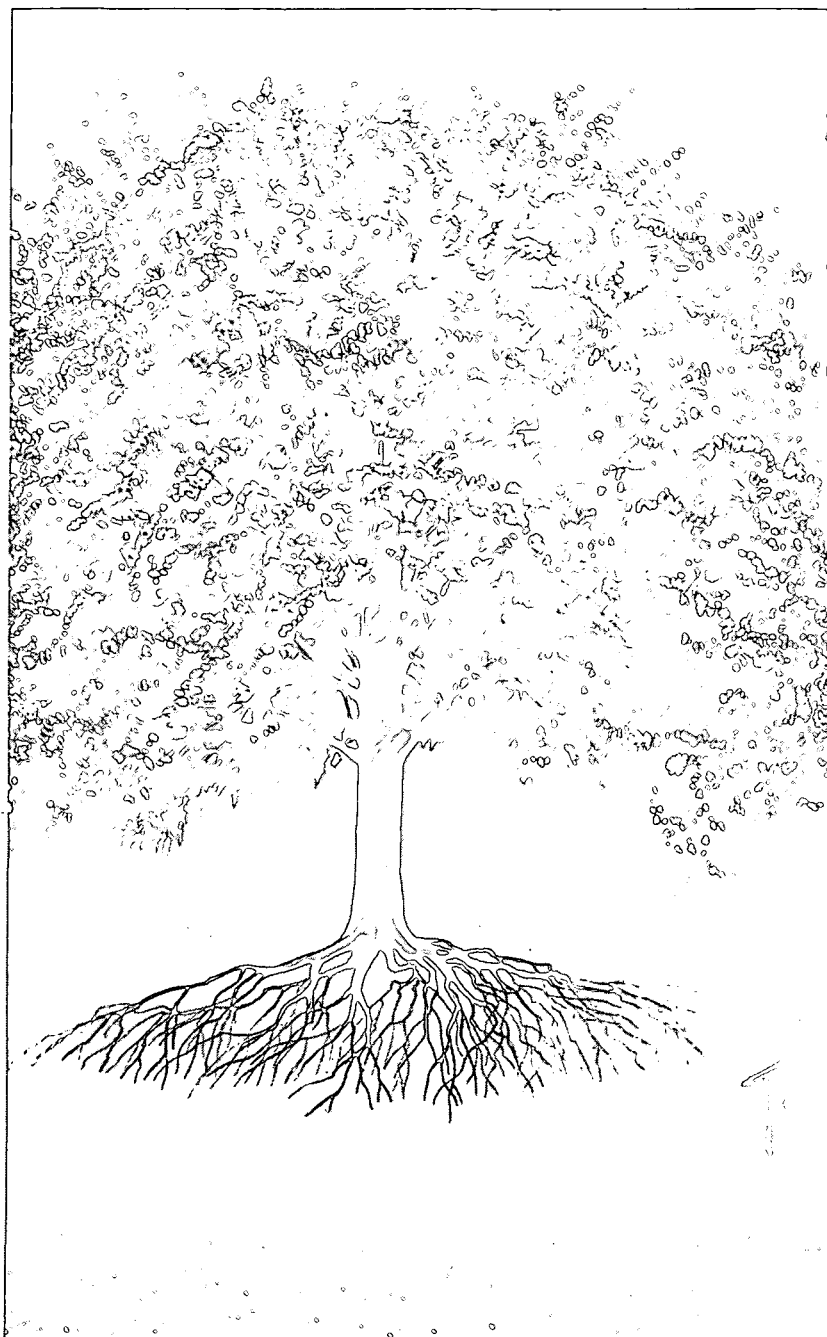
But as I neared the bridgework,
A green-and-orange troll
Said, "Halt right there, my good jerk,
Unless you've got the toll."

I did a smart about-face,
Although my tear-ducts burned,
And no more did I retrace
My steps once I'd returned.

O, I have roamed the world wide,
Where wonders stun the eyes,
But nowhere have I e'er spied
A marvel like those pies!

It's not the bridge's pass-fee
That keeps me from my goals . . .
It's just that fine folk like me
Don't talk to common trolls.

—Marvin Kaye



Illustrated by Gary Freeman

This is it?" Jansoon asked.

"This is it, sir." The steward shifted nervously on his feet.

They stood inside the shallow cave, Jansoon looking at what appeared to be an oval patch of elephant skin inset in the rock. The steward picked at a scab on his knuckle.

"This is all there is?"

"Uh, yes sir. This is the only visible part of it."

Jansoon heaved a great sigh. He had been picked out of a hoard of midlevel information officers for this. For *this* — about one square meter of elephant skin, or whatever it was, in a cave, on a world so unimportant that in the catalog, there was not even a comment appended to the description of its location and type. Atmosphere very breathable — even a little over-oxygenated. And big. 32,000 kilometers through the center, yet the gravity was not as much more than earth gravity as one would expect.

"Take me back," he told the steward.

The young officer nearly ran from the cave.

Jansoon stepped out into the light. He let his eye travel to the horizon. Instead of ending where it seemed it should have, the horizon was elevated, and band upon band of dismal crag-filled terrain stretched away a frightening distance.

"There's nothing else in the cave?" he asked hopefully.

"No sir," said the steward, guiding him through jagged boulders to the living

the Wayne Wightman Greater Gift

How much is ever enough?

quarters. "If I may speak, sir?"

"Please."

The steward, Vinson, his name tag read, stopped and turned to him. "Sir," he said seriously, "it's very nice here. It's very quiet and peaceful, and the weather is steady, just like this, all year round. We all like it here. It's very peaceful and not hard on the nerves."

Jansoon's opinion of his assignment was steadily lowering. If the rest of the staff shared Vinson's idea of the good life, Jansoon could see himself turning into a soma addict or lapsing into a term-long semi-comatose funk.

"Vinson, what's your opinion of that thing in the cave? You know what it is? What does it do?" Jansoon looked across at him as they walked. The question clearly keyed some troubling response in the steward.

"I don't remember," he said finally.

"Really," Jansoon chuckled. "How long have you been here?"

"Uh, nine years, Earthtime, sir. Since we established the first settlement here."

Jansoon followed the other man a few more paces — and felt seized by vertigo all of a sudden and fell against a boulder.

Vinson hovered over him an instant later, helping him up and brushing him off. "Little earthquake, sir. They happen all the time. Never anything bigger than that. You'll get. . ."

"I know," Jansoon interrupted. "I'll get used to it."

"Yes sir."

A few moments later they came into sight of the long, round-topped living quarters; it was not spacious, but it was large enough to house Jansoon and the staff of fifteen comfortably.

"Have you remembered by now what that thing is that you showed me in the cave, Vinson?" They approached the entryway.

The steward's face wrinkled in deep concentration. "Sir, um, Commander, I couldn't say. I never thought to ask. Director Collaan can tell you more, sir."

Jansoon felt very tired now, and more than the slight extra gravity was causing it. He had spent over eight months being tested for this position. The Ministry of Off-world Resources of the Second Technocracy now had a profile on him that included every dimple on his psyche, every last pore of his soul. Apparently they believed he would do whatever there was to be done better than anyone else they could find.

And that indeed was the strange part. Not once had any clue turned up as to what he would be doing here on Timon. Not a word. "Classified," was the answer usually given. Or, "You'll know when it's time." He accepted that — and probably for that willingness, he had been granted their approval and was here.

"Nowhere," he mumbled. He entered the LQ where the staff of fifteen presented itself.

A tall woman with thick brown hair broke rank and approached.

"Commander Jansoon, I am Director Collaan. This is your staff on Timon. Dinner is in thirty minutes. You may rest, or we can begin briefing."

Jansoon made a mental note that Collaan probably ran Timon no matter who was Commander. Her cold steady eyes waited patiently for his answer.

"Briefing," he said.

"As you wish, sir." She dismissed the staff, who seemed greatly relieved, and ushered him into a spacious office that already had his name on the door.

"I feel presumptuous sitting behind that desk when I'm as ignorant of what's happening here as I was before I applied for the position."

"Sit where you like," she said dryly. "That's your prerogative."

Dismal world, unpleasant people, he thought. He took up a tablet and stylus. "Please begin, Director."

She did not settle herself when she sat. She perched rigidly inside the arms of the chair.

"Commander Jansoon, to the rest of the Technocracy, Timon is the planet we're standing on. But to you and me, Timon is the thing that lives *inside* this piece of rock."

"Something lives. . . ."

"Yes sir. This planet is inhabited, as nearly as we can tell, by exactly one alien being; Timon."

He put his notepad aside. "Before I was transported down, I was given an order to follow the steward for a tour of the base. And that thing he showed me in the cave. . . ."

"Was Timon. That's the name he gives himself, by the way. We don't know why, but he is addressed as Timon. Needless to say, this is classified information."

"Why not." Jansoon fumbled with the stylus and finally dropped it. "What is the thing? How big is it? Either Vinson didn't know what it was or he had forgotten . . . which is a laugh, isn't it. He doesn't like this Timon much, does he?"

"Vinson has been here so long he probably has forgotten," she said flatly.

"You're kidding me."

"Vinson is somewhat eccentric."

"Really." Jansoon knew that even the mildest eccentricity was grounds for being yanked straight back to Earth. Perhaps Director Collaan was the eccentric. "Why doesn't Vinson like Timon?"

"Let me tell you what Timon does. Timon, for the last five years, has supplied over ninety percent of the Technocracy's demand for gold, platinum, silver, rubies, polonium, rubidium, and a dozen other precious minerals. Timon, to make it short, is priceless and essential to the continued expansion of the Technocracy."

Jansoon's face went slack. Was she lying? A year before, he had spent his time briefing officials on petty bureaucratic rules of conduct. And now — *now* people were calling him *Commander* Jansoon, and this woman was telling him that he was the man on the pulse line of the Technocracy's main source of precious minerals.

"I don't. . . I mean, I wasn't trained to . . . or even told."

"Of course not. The information is too import to release until absolutely necessary. One loose rumor and the Dorgrid Empire or even a renegade corporation would sacrifice everything to get their hands on this."

Jansoon sat stunned. Director Collaan reported the information in a monotone. The light brown mass of hair enclosed her head like a ruff, and when she spoke, only an occasional curl moved. She was pretty, but her widely-spaced eyes were hard and flat.

"Would you care for dinner in your office this evening?" she asked.

"Yes. I don't think I feel very . . . sociable just yet."

She stood to leave. "Tomorrow I'll show you the entire operation and how we communicate with Timon."

"Director Collaan — tell me one other thing before you go. How do we get the material from Timon?"

Just before activating the door she turned to him. "It is very simple. We ask and he gives. It's left in a tunnel for us to pick up."

"That's all?"

"Entirely all."

He felt his forehead gather in wrinkles. "Director, what exactly does this cost us in effort or credits or whatever? What do we give him in exchange?"

A wisp of a smile passed over her lips. "You share the suspicions of my grandmother, Commander. She believed that for cheap you got cheap, and for free you got yourself in trouble. The greater gift, she said, was not the one that was taken, but the one that was given. Timon asks for nothing. We ask, he gives. As far as we know, it's absolutely free." She paused, a smile on her lips but not in her eyes. "It is all very strange, isn't it, Commander?"

He started to say "Yes" but she had gone. He felt the faint movement underfoot of another earthquake. This was not the kind of place where he wanted to spend much of his life.

ONE HALF OF THE surface of the planet was covered with a slightly saline ocean. The other half was rolling hills uniformly littered with ragged boulders. There seemed to be no rain whatsoever. Usually cool — and sometimes bitterly cold — the winds were little more than breezes, and nowhere across the land was there an insect, a weed, or any other living thing except Jansoon and his staff.

Commander Jansoon and Director Collaan had walked from the LQ down to what they called the output area. It was another cave, a dead-end tunnel really, deeper and wider than the one where Jansoon had seen Timon.

"This," she instructed him, "is the output area — where the material appears.

At first, watches were posted to see where it came from, but as long as anyone was there, nothing happened. So it's left unattended. The sixteen of us are all that are here anyway. The minerals usually appear two or three days after requested. It's seemed to me that there are more earthquakes right after the requests. Maybe that means something. Anyway, then they're hauled down to the transporter station along this track. The staff takes care of all this, but you might want to go along to see that the material is transported up to the freighter without any hitches. They send back down a 'received' signal and that's that. No other communications except in extreme emergencies. The boys on the freighters don't even know what they're picking up."

"We're isolated. Completely cut off here?"

"That's right, Commander."

He turned his eyes from the dim cavern to hers. They were still cold and flat, constantly measuring his responses.

"Director, why am I here? I went through my office last night and there's nothing there that tells me about anything but the climate. I must say," he added sarcastically, "it is a lovely climate, if one doesn't mind what comes with it."

"What would that be, sir?"

He stepped into the sunlight, hoping the warmth might shake the chill from his bones. "That would be the delightful assistance of my staff. Last night after dinner when I tried to talk to them, the weather was the one thing they all loved to tell me about, how calm it is, how predictable, how lovely. One word about Timon and I began to get twitchy nervous reactions. They're scared of whatever is in that cave, aren't they?"

"They don't know you yet, sir," she said pleasantly. "They are afraid they might offend you."

"They're starting to be offensive already. And you — you brief me, but you do it with some kind of chip on your shoulder. What is it, Collaan? What do you have against me? What is there I should know?"

Her flat blue eyes fixed him like pincers. Jansoon knew she was not intimidated, but he refused to avert his gaze.

"There is nothing you need to know, sir. You were carefully selected for this position. You receive orders for the minerals. You go to Timon — or 'that piece of elephant skin' as you referred to him this morning — and you tell him what you want. You tell him nothing more, you ask him nothing else. You don't mention to any of us what the Ministry is getting out of Timon. And no one dislikes you, Commander. That is all you need to know." She stood perfectly calm and immobile, only several of her curls sticking out of her hood moved in the cold breeze.

"And it's as simple as that," he snapped.

"Yes sir, perhaps it is."

"Perhaps. And you've told me everything." He barely controlled his anger; his fists were pressing on his hipbones and his fingers were white with tension.

"I've told you precisely what I was ordered to tell you."

Again they stared at each other in dead silence.

"If I may suggest, sir, you might wish to examine the transporter facilities." She started to walk away.

"I have already examined them — yesterday when I arrived. Director Collaan, you seem to know much more about this operation than you're willing to tell me, so why weren't you made commander of this allegedly crucial operation?"

Something happened in her eyes. They narrowed and stared straight into his own. "If I may speak, sir, make no mistake — this is as crucial an operation as you

have ever heard of. And as for my not being commander — I would never have been selected." She paused and smiled humorlessly. "I'm unreliable. I'm liable to ask Timon a question or two. And that's forbidden, you know."

She turned and strode back toward the LQ. After a moment he followed. He refused to work blindfolded, he thought. He could not direct a situation where everyone knew more than he did. If she wouldn't give him straight answers to what was happening here, he would go to Timon.

"You are permitted to ask nothing of Timon," she said as she stood in front of his desk later that day, "except that which you are ordered to ask." She continued reading from an official order. "You are not permitted to comment on any topic. In the event that Timon asks anything of you, you are not permitted to answer. In short, you convey requests from the Ministry of Off-world Resources to Timon, and that is *all* you do." She looked up, apparently for a question, if he had one.

"Why wasn't a machine hired to do this, Director Collaan?"

"I wouldn't know, sir."

He sprang up from his chair. "Get out of here, Collaan! Get out of my sight!"

JANSOON TOOK long walks. The planet had no variety. Upended craggy boulders covered the world. Only the rolling hills of stone kept it from being absolutely monotonous. Thin clouds colored the vast horizon with bands of browns and greys. Somewhere to the east, seven or eight thousand kilometers, lay the grey sea.

On his walks, Jansoon found places — *his* places — where he could sit with his back against a smooth stone facing and let the sun warm his face as it drifted across the pale sky.

He dreamed of Earth and the times he had been able to see the Pacific . . . the sand, the slate-blue water, the gulls . . . On Timon there were no birds — only rocks, sky, sixteen people, and orders.

In three months now, he had found out exactly nothing. Nonetheless, his anger had subsided. Timon was some kind of organism that lived inside the planet, and how big or old, or what it was was not discussed. Jansoon stood before the patch of "elephant skin" every eight or nine days and recited the orders he had received. Rubidium — 720 kilos; polonium — 16 kilos; gold — 15,000 kilos, etc. And then it all appeared and was transported off the planet. A freighter would signal that they received it, and that was that. No other transmissions came or went. The single break in the monotony was when the transporter operators would return with a parcel sent down from the freighter. Condensed foods and injectable nutrients usually. And soma — always soma. Only the steady inflow of soma kept Jansoon's staff from going stark raving mandrill. There was enough of it in the stores to keep all sixteen of them in the thickest dreams for several months.

Much of the time, Jansoon picked his way across the boulders in the vicinity of the LQ, searching for a good place to lie in the sun, and thinking of what a bungle he'd made of his life.

When he'd heard of this position, he hoped for something exotic but realized there would be hardship wherever he went. Hardship he had been prepared to face. But boredom — unshrinking incredible interminable boredom he had not expected. He had a staff of good healthy men who were obsessed with talking about the weather. His chief assistant apparently loathed him — for reasons he couldn't begin to fathom. And Timon. He figured Timon would be the source of answers and he plotted times when he could secretly talk to him . . . but

something in him forbade this. He just couldn't do it. The whole thing made him realize how much better off he would be at home being tortured for crimes he never committed.

"Commander?"

He kept his eyes closed, the sun rose-pink through his eyelids. He recognized the Director's voice but did not care to answer. Here, in his place, his time was his own.

"Commander, are you all right?" The voice was closer. "Commander?"

"Everything is fine, Collaan."

"Is this what you do out here?"

It sounded like incipient antagonism, so he declined to answer.

"Some of us have wondered how you were doing. You aren't around much." She set herself on a rock several meters away from him.

"I get the job done. A half-witted parrot could get the job done."

"Yes sir. You've kept to yourself a great deal. We just wondered."

"Thanks so much. Collaan, I've thought it over, and as an expression of my gratitude for all your help and your forthcoming assistance, why don't you just leave me the hell alone? Please."

He kept his eyes closed but could hear that she was not moving.

"Director Collaan." He pulled himself up and opened his eyes. The dull colors of the planet were for a few moments even duller. "Director Collaan, what do you want me to do? Would you like for me to rage at you? I'm really having too much fun lying here in the sun to do that."

She stared at her feet. Nothing of her face showed.

"Would you like for me to recommend you to be Commander of this . . . slag heap? Why anyone would spend more than one enlistment here beats the hell out of me. What do you want, Director? Please, I'm feeling generous. I have nothing but contempt for you, but I'll give you all of it that you wish. Just ask."

"I'm sorry if I make you feel like that." It was the first time her voice hadn't been hard enough to bounce rocks.

"Director, I'm curious about you. Is there anything you like? Either on this world or any other?"

Her expression didn't change. "I'm very happy here."

"Bullshit, he said politely. "A blind man could see that's utter bullshit. Well, since you're very happy here, is there one thing you can think of you might like to have here that you don't?"

Her mouth jerked up at one corner. "Trees," she said.

"Trees?" He had not expected that.

"Just one would do." She looked up. "Commander, maybe it's time for some straight talk."

"Maybe. Maybe it's only time for more evasions, half-answers and lies."

"I haven't lied." Her coldness, her hard shell had cracked.

"Telling me I only needed to know and carry out my orders? Maybe I could salvage a splinter of my sanity if I knew the full story about our mysterious stranger with the elephant skin and his free gifts."

"You'd be happier not knowing," she said quietly.

"Listen," he said. "Let's do this one step at a time. Little steps, all right? Why doesn't the staff mention Timon? Telling me that shouldn't violate too many directives. Whatever Timon is, he's pretty unusual — and simple orders never stop loose talk. One thing I've noticed here, Collaan, there is no loose talk."

She was staring at him again, her lips pressed tight. "They can't, sir. They've had their memories altered and certain patterns in their brains blanked out. They

can't think about him, let alone talk about him."

Jansoon felt his neck tighten. The only sound was the endless breeze across the jagged tips of the rocks. A silent tremor shook the ground, almost unnoticeable.

"They can't talk about Timon?"

"No sir. They were here when Timon was discovered. They knew about it, talked to it, listened to it, and when the Ministry found out what they could get from it, the lid went on all over the Technocracy. All references of any form that could lead anyone here looking for minerals were eliminated. This includes their abilities to verbalize anything relating to Timon."

"But you haven't had your memory changed. Why not? And when my term is up..."

"When your term is up, you'll probably elect to stay here rather than have your memory altered. That's the choice they'll give you."

Jansoon sensed a bundle of pieces beginning to fall into place.

"My god," he said. "I thought they only did that with criminals. I'll forget my family, my childhood..."

"And you'll forget Timon. Exactly. That's why I'm still here and able to remember where I came from. You're a potential criminal, too, don't forget, since you know what this planet has to offer. The Dorgrid would give you whatever you wanted — your own solar system — for the coordinates of a place like this."

Jansoon wanted to close his eyes and go backwards in time just a little to where he didn't know these things. He hadn't volunteered for an assignment, he had sentenced himself to prison.

"But don't think that if you do elect to leave that you'll be allowed to: saying that you want to leave indicates dissatisfaction to the Ministry. You'll be dispersed. The memory alteration is just a threat to see how serious you are about leaving."

Jansoon stood up. Instead of a dreary miserable place to spend two years, he saw a prison. A vast boundless prison.

"You see," she continued, "you were picked for this job first because you were unimportant. No one would miss you for long."

"Wait a..."

"And second because you follow orders. You do exactly what you're told."

"Wait a god damned minute. I have family. I have friends. They were interested in me and concerned that I would be gone for such a long time. If I'm gone longer than two years, they'll make inquiries. I'll be looked for."

A hard glint came back into her eyes. "Just think about it."

"I admit I believe in following orders," he went on, hearing the note of desperation in his voice. "But if I enlisted because of false promises..."

"You did. But if you're in doubt, ask Timon."

"I couldn't..." He was caught. Everything in his training said "No" and said it in thunder. But behind the thunder, behind the basework of his training, something else said that he *could* go against his orders. "I've thought about talking to Timon, but..." He thought he saw a faint smile on her lips. "Maybe. Let's walk over there. I don't know. Maybe I can talk to him. Let's do it now before I change my mind."

They began the trek to the cave, their boots making hard scuffing sounds against the boulders.

"A couple of other details, Director," he said from behind her. "Why haven't they erased your memories?"

"They need you to relay the orders and keep everything under control, and they need me to check on you. It's only us, you know. Mention Timon to the

others and you'll get nothing but confused looks."

"I've noticed. What is Timon? How big, how old?"

"He's big. Very big. My guess is that he's about one-third of the mass of the planet. I think of him as being like an octopus — a million arms or more, incredibly huge — and this . . ." (she pointed to the ground) "is his shell. We ask for minerals and he moves one of his 'hands' and gives it to us. Years ago, when they tried to do some soundings here, the readings were just a mish-mash of meaningless numbers. Timon effectively scrambled everything. So I know he's very big but I don't know much else. Oh yes, the previous commander knew something about planetary geology. He said this planet is far too old for this system. Much too old. And its mass and location in the system here is all wrong. Make of that what you will."

They walked in silence for a kilometer. The high film of pale clouds hung unmoving over their heads.

"What happened to the other commander?"

"He refused to relay the orders to Timon. He thought the planet was being exploited to finance our various wars. In short, I guess he liked Timon. I think he was talking to Timon when he shouldn't have been. Commander Dontissin was dispersed."

From behind the upcoming hill, a corner of the LQ came into view. They veered to the south, toward the cave.

"Why didn't you tell me all this sooner?"

"Wouldn't have done you any good. I thought you might be a plant, a spy sent to find out how much I knew myself — and if I knew too much — phht." She stumbled while she was explaining and he took her hand. It was warm. He had not touched her before.

"Thank you," she murmured.

"My pleasure," he said. And he meant it.

THEY STOOD inside the shallow cave, both facing the heavily furrowed "skin" imbedded in the wall of stone. Jansoon glanced once quickly at Collaan before speaking.

"Timon: today I have no requests for minerals. I would like information." Jansoon fumbled with the closure on his jacket. Talking like this went against all his training. "Timon, are you listening?"

"I am always listening," Timon said in Jansoon's own voice.

"What . . ."

"How better to speak to you than in a voice you're most familiar with?"

"Timon, what are you?"

"Everything she has told you is true. I am very old and the ground you walk on is the shelter in which I live."

Jansoon waved his hand, feeling foolish and helpless: "How did you know that? We were. . ."

"How do you know I was not beside you then?"

The woman moved forward a pace. "You mean that you know everything that goes on here, even inside the LQ?"

"Yes," Timon answered in her voice. "As living organisms you are somewhat interesting."

"Why," Collaan said, her voice shaking in her throat, "why do you give us all the precious minerals? Why do you just give them to us?"

Again in her voice: "They are not precious to me. The materials you take are the least of what I will give you."

"The least? We haven't asked for anything else."

"Send this message," Timon said in Jansoon's voice. "Tell Over-minister Claussin that Timon wishes to speak to him."

"Claussin will never come here," Collaan said. "He's far too important to travel out to a mining world."

"Tell him the message concerns the Dorgrid activity in Sector 109/702," said the voice. "He will come."

A WEEK LATER, Over-minister Claussin arrived with an armada of eighteen ships. From the transporter area to Timon's cave, an armed guard stood every two meters. Wordlessly, Jansoon walked beside the Over-minister down the corridor of shouldered weapons, helmets, and rigid soldier faces.

"It's here, sir."

Claussin stood just a little more rigidly. One hand lightly touched his temple. An eye glanced in Jansoon's direction. "I don't need any assistance. Leave."

Soldiers moved between Jansoon and Claussin, separating Jansoon from the cave and keeping him half a dozen meters from the opening.

Over-minister Claussin was not used to being sent for. His mood had not made it pleasant for those around him for days.

"All right," he said, standing inside the cave. "What is this about Dorgrid activity." Claussin's attitude did not permit him to question; he demanded answers.

"The Dorgrid have no interest in 109/702," Timon said in Claussin's voice.

"So what is all this about," Claussin snapped, his patience broken.

"In two months, half of everything taken from me by the Second Technocracy must be returned. It is imperative that this be done. Then, after a brief period, Timon will serve you again. Otherwise, there will be nothing else for you on this planet. Nothing."

"But why? What have we done to you to deserve this?"

"The materials you take are the least Timon will give you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Return half."

"Why? You haven't said why."

"Return half or I will instruct the Dorgrid how to take it."

The Over-minister's face turned as white as paper. "We could turn this pile of rock into ash. You know that. And rather than let the Dorgrid have it, we will." Claussin turned, his mind nearly blind with rage, his hands wanting to snatch and tear anything within reach. "I swear, we will turn this place to ash!"

"Timon is not helpless."

"You threaten me?" Claussin tried to laugh but only made a scraping noise in his throat.

"Return half. Timon will serve you again, but return half, or the Dorgrid will be waiting for you when your ship comes out of hyperspace."

"We will . . ."

"You will die in helpless confusion. You will die not knowing where you are or what is killing you. Timon is not helpless. Return half of what you've taken."

Claussin's anger and frustration began to pale in the face of his fear. "You can't do that. You're locked inside this miserable piece of mud and you're bluffing. You're helpless!"

"On your return to Earth," Timon said in a cool imitation of Claussin's voice, "two of your armada will never come out of hyperspace. Return half of what you've taken. Now go."

Seconds later, the Over-minister emerged from the cave, his eyes twitching from soldier to soldier, almost as though he expected an attempt on his life. Sweat began to run out of his hair. "Jansoon!" he bellowed.

The guards parted, opening up a passage between the two of them.

"Seal up this cave," he ordered. "There will be no further communications for you to relay until . . . whenever." Then to his men: "Immediate departure. Let's get the hell out of this ugly place."

In an hour everyone had been transported back to the ships, and Jansoon and Collaan leaned on a cold magnesium railing just outside the transporter station.

"Well, fellow conspirator," she said as she touched his arm. "Shall we go ask Timon what gives? I have a feeling we're going to need to know if we want to keep these bodily molecules in some coherent shape."

"Might as well. Claussin is probably making out the orders for our dispersal right now."

Jansoon hooked his arm in hers and together they departed. The planet's breeze blew cool against their faces, and the ground tremored perceptibly.

OVER-MINISTER Claussin stood before a viewscreen and counted the ships that reappeared from hyperspace. Their highlights seemed to materialize first, and around these glowing spots amidst the stars, the ships would ooze into existence. They hung like toys against the beaded black of space. He counted them again.

A door opened with a hushing sound behind him. A neutral voice: "Sir?"

Claussin touched a place on the studded panel and the screen faded. He turned to face the officer, his features weary and heavy on his face. This would be a messenger from the bridge, and the message would be no surprise.

"Two of our ships, sir."

"You may leave now," Claussin said with exhaustion heavy in his words.

"But I haven't told you . . ."

Claussin looked at him with a look so filled with an ancient malevolence that the officer quickly ducked his head, acknowledging the Over-minister's superior insight, and stepped backward out of the room.

Claussin gazed at his old hands. Only that morning everything was under control. Now, people would have to die — that was always the price of the unexpected.

TIMON'S CAVE was sealed. A silver cataplast wall, as smooth as any they'd ever seen, covered the entrance.

"I saved you the trouble," said a voice like Jansoon's, only lacking some of the resonance.

"Where are you?"

"Beside you, beneath you, where I always am."

"We'd like to know what you said to him. We're . . . afraid. We're in the middle of something we don't understand."

Timon recounted his orders to the Over-minister and the threats on both sides.

"Why, Timon?" Collaan asked. "For what reason did you do this?"

"I wish to give a gift greater than I have given you before. If your people are not cooperative, I will turn to the Dorgrid, give them what they request and then give them the greater gift."

"I'm afraid to ask what it is," Jansoon said more to Collaan than to Timon.

"Knowing what it is is the gift."

The wind had turned cold and the sun had dropped near the horizon.

"Timon," Collaan said, barely above a whisper. "You wouldn't help the Dorgrid. You know what they are. They strip every world they come to. They..." Her voice faded away.

The two of them began to see: they were implicated by Collaan's accusations against the Dorgrid. They stood together, alone, in the vast planet's twilight. Surrounded by thousands of kilometers of ragged boulders, they saw that from Timon's place in this world, between them and the Dorgrid, there was little difference. Greed ruled both.

The dusk thickened and the high clouds eased from gray to charcoal.

"If you were Timon," said the voice, speaking now in neither of their cadences, "you would see yourselves and the Dorgrid as two species of insect. You would make little distinction between one and the other."

"Timon," said Jansoon, "what in god's name are you?"

The breeze was now only the slightest breath and the sun finally slipped behind the furthest range of black rock-covered hills.

"You do not want to know. I know you, and you do not want to know."

Jansoon and Collaan clung to each other, chilled to their hearts.

OVER-MINISTER Claussin sat at the head of the aluminum table, his face a hard mask of grimness. Every muscle in his face pulled the flesh tight across his skull, and when he gestured, he moved rigidly, stiffly.

"Gentlemen, we are meeting face to face in order to avoid any unauthorized tapping of our conversation. It..." He broke off. Clearly, he was not now acting like the man the dozen of them had dealt with before. "It is imperative that we reach some compromise here. Timon has given us wealth and power beyond anything we ever dreamed of. Unless we..."

"If you're going to badger me or my corporation into conceding more than we've..."

"Sir!" the Over-minister rasped. "Please sit down."

"I will not sit down," said the pale man. His white eyes were as flat as spots of chalk. "You sit down. I've heard everything you have to say. Now you can listen to me. If Alphelectric pulls out half the rubidium we shipped in from Timon — the entire planet will go dark, I promise you that. We can't do it. We *can't*."

A woman with short square teeth and quick delicate hands snapped to her feet, her words directed at the Over-minister: "If you think you can take his share of rubidium from Metaplast, we will refuse every demand. Even the smallest demand will be refused," she growled, pointing one of her pencil-thin fingers at the Minister.

Another stood up. "Do you expect us to remove half of the five hundred million jeweled contacts from a hundred million Zedex computers? Even if we would do it, it would take..."

"You can ask," said a silver-eyed man in a piercing laconic tone, "and you can ask and you can ask." He chuckled. "But Halcyon Drug Group will not dismantle the equipment that has been built since Timon came into our lives. We could perhaps gather some excess quantities of the minerals... but—" (his silver eyes shined) "—gentlemen, the products of my company are all that keep most of you on your feet. As far as Timon's demands are concerned, Halcyon will donate, but Halcyon will not sacrifice."

"You will," shouted a woman whose skin was the color of oxidized copper. "Millimax Unity is the target of your refusal, obviously it is."

The man with silver eyes did not move, did not even seem to breathe. His

hands lay like pale molded plastic on the table.

"Millimax Unity uses high portions of Timon's polonium as does Halcyon, and unless you meet your fair share, Millimax will be forced to liquidate vast areas of its investments — and you would love that, wouldn't you!" The woman's hands perched like clawed spiders on the table. "Halcyon will give!"

The Over-minister pounded the flat of his hand on the table. "You've got to stop this! All of us have to sacrifice since all of us have profited! If Timon gets in touch with the Dorgrid. . ."

"The board of Zedex is not fooled by this simulated panic," said a short man from the far end of the table. His voice knifed across all other noises. "Our investigations indicate that the Over-minister and certain corporations whose members are present at this table have conspired to first panic and then ruin several major corporations of the Technocracy, and Zedex is on their list." Around the table, eyes flicked from face to face. "Zedex recognizes a threat, not from the outside, but from within, and we know who the enemy is."

"Mr. Canaille. . ." the Over-minister said threateningly.

"Zedex will take appropriate steps to protect its interests."

"Mr. Canaille, in the name of god, don't threaten violence."

"You wouldn't use violence," the dark woman sneered. "Not where deception and conspiracy could get you what you want. Millimax Unity also recognizes a threat to its immediate safety. We know that only with the help of the higher echelons of the Technocracy could such a plan as this be effected." She backed away from the table, her dark copper skin turning a deeper brown.

"Please! Please!" the Over-minister begged. "The message from Timon was unequivocal. He has powers we don't understand. The two ships that disappeared. . ."

"Begging will get you nothing!" shouted another member who moved cautiously toward the door.

The man with flat silver eyes turned his gaze to the Minister, but he said nothing. From an unseen pocket he quietly drew a wire knife and from under a cupped hand on the table, he pointed it at the face of the Over-minister.

"This is not so," the Over-minister was saying over the noise. "There is no plot, there is a threat from the Dorgrid. Timon has said he would. . ."

He was going to say "cooperate," but an almost invisible snake of wire lashed at his face, slipped into a coil, spun around, flashed into an opposite-winding coil and left the Over-minister's head a screaming mass of blood and hair and skin. Flecks of peeled flesh dotted the wall and ceiling.

The room quickly emptied, the members mouths tight, their eyes watching everyone's hands.

At the end of the table, the Over-minister's head lay on its side, the fluid from one slashed eye pooling slowly on the polished aluminum table.

"COMMANDER, THERE is still no reply," Steward Vinson said.

Jansoon felt the urge to shrug. "Continue the auto-tape with random band shifts. All we can do is hope someone hears us."

Vinson nodded.

Jansoon and Collaan left the LQ and strolled toward the transporter area. It had been this way for 72 days now. No orders came to be relayed to Timon. No ships hovered beyond the atmosphere. Messages sent out went unanswered.

One of the thermoplast walls of the transporter building faced the sun and was warm with its heat. The two of them leaned against it. She put her hand on one of his knees.

"I have a feeling," he said, after taking a great sighing breath. "I think when a message does come through, we aren't going to like it."

She nodded. "And in the meantime we have each other's company — and soma."

"And the others."

"I feel sorry for them," she said. "This is all they know, all they remember, and even then they can't think about anything related to Timon without going half blank."

"Suppose Timon will talk to us today?"

She flipped her hands in a gesture of doubt. "Since the Over-minister left he's been telling us not to worry. And Timon has us in the palm of his hand, so to speak. So what else should we do but not worry?"

They lay back, collecting the sun on their skin.

"This is a dreadful place to spend the last of one's life," she said with no particular emphasis.

"Have you ever seen the ocean? The Pacific, I mean."

"No. Once my family had a reservation, but it was cancelled. You know, if there were trees here, or even a few weeds, I wouldn't mind half so much. God. If there was anything besides off-white sky, brown rocks, and grey horizon. If I think about it too much, I cry." She stopped a moment. "What's your favorite tree?"

"I never thought about it."

"Mine are peach trees. The bark turns black when it rains, and in the fall their leaves are green and yellow and orange all at once. I saw peaches on a tree once and they were this big. . . ." (she cupped her hands together) ". . . and when I bit into one, the juice . . . was so sweet. . . ."

Jansoon put his arm around her. After a while they made their way back to the LQ. One step inside the door told them that something had happened.

"Commander?" Vinson said. "Something came in about an hour ago. I'll put it on."

The staff stood scattered around the communications room, nervously picking at their hands or shifting their eyes from person to person. Vinson dropped the message cartridge into the receiver: a man, his colors not quite true to life, stood before them, a freighter captain by his insignia.

"Emergency information to all sectors. This is the freighter *Osmiis*. The following tape should be copied and relayed. Date: 42.941.721. We have no further information."

"Made a week ago, real time," Collaan whispered.

The remainder of the message was a survey of Earth by some ship whose scanners were clearly outdated. It showed dark stains seeping across the oceans, and on the continents, where the angular shapes of cities had covered vast portions of the land, there was a smooth surface that reflected no light, where everything had been blasted flat and melted smooth.

"The Dorgrid," Jansoon murmured. "That's their mark."

A low power scan on the night side showed none of the usual globs of the megalopolis lights. A life-form read-out in a lower corner of the image registered less than a millionth of what it should have.

"If there was war," Collaan said quietly, "why haven't we heard? How did they miss us?"

The report ran on. Wide scans, detailed scenes of disaster, barren plains that should have been swarming with life, continent-long bands of drifting smoke. . . .

The staff stared at the shifting images, vaguely sensing some kinship with the devastated planet, but feeling mainly only a guilty confusion. Finally it broke off.

The captain of the freighter gave several message codes, and Jansoon drew Collaan aside and out the door.

"It's time to speak to Timon," he said. "He must have had something to do with this. He gave information to the Dorgrid."

The cataplast sealing wall was gone. As before, they stepped inside the cave and stood before the creased and wrinkled section of the wall.

"Timon?"

"Timon is listening," came back his voice, altered slightly.

"Timon, the Dorgrid have killed Earth." He stopped. He had difficulty breathing. "We just saw it. There was war. . . ."

"There was no war with the Dorgrid," Timon said. "Your people butchered themselves. The Dorgrid know nothing of this, nor will they."

Jansoon's mind was reeling. "Themselves? They butchered themselves? How? Why?" A hot buzzing filled his head.

"Because I gave them the chance to exercise their greed."

Jansoon threw himself at the wall. "You killed them! You caused all of them to die!" He struck the warm wrinkled surface with his fists again and again. "Because of you, everyone died, everything is dead!"

Collaan caught and held him when he slumped back, weeping. Together, they left the cave, Jansoon still covering his face with his hands. Before them lay their home, an endless desert of jagged boulders under a colorless, endless sky. Neither of them, at that moment, would have avoided a simple death.

THE QUAKES were stronger that night, but Jansoon and Collaan and the others knew nothing of that. They dreamed of the Pacific Ocean, of trees and women and friends, they dreamed of cities and the crush of anonymous people and being surrounded by life, they dreamed of streets and dogs and cats and all of them dreamed of whole fresh food with its real color and smell. Jansoon and Collaan had drunk down cup after cup of soma before sleeping, and the others, watching them with a sort of baffled dread, had done the same. So now their dreams blossomed with colors and odors and textures that the planet had deprived them of.

By morning the quakes had ceased, and they all wordlessly performed their duties. Dreams of home left hangovers of silence.

By 800, Jansoon had decided to go for a walk, a very long walk. He pocketed a tube of food and stepped out the LQ door. He stopped dead in his tracks — and he giggled. He giggled like a child.

"Collaan!" he called back through the door. "And the rest of you — outside!"

Collaan rose from the chair where she had been sitting and examining an eating knife. She shuffled tiredly toward him.

"Timon has a present for you," he said.

There, right in front of the LQ, where the night before only boulders lay, was a cleared field fifty meters each way. Standing in full pink bloom, square in the middle of it, was a peach tree.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "It isn't there."

"I see it," Vinson said behind her.

Other voices agreed, and they agreed with more excitement than Jansoon had heard since he'd come there.

They walked carefully across the loose dirt, astonished at its texture. Finally, underneath the tree, Collaan said, "I don't. . . just don't understand it, but it's. . . I love it!" She wiped her eyes. "Why a. . . a peach tree, for god's sake?"

"I listened to you as you slept," she heard a voice like her own say.

"Where are you now?" Jansoon asked, searching the ground with his eyes. "I am wherever you look," Timon said.

Vinson began laughing foolishly. "I remember something," he laughed. "I do, I do remember something!" He jumped and danced under the tree.

Overhead, rainclouds began to gather, and across the hills, its sound carried away by the laughter, a bird sang. ●

Evil of the Day

by Mitchell S. White

(Muir Woods, California. November 18, 1979)

Mitchell S. White: These interviews are supposed to give the reader an idea of who WW is, so let me quote something you wrote. "Dreams are the fingerprints of character."

Wayne Wightman: I don't remember writing that.

MSW: What I want to do is ask you some hypothetical questions regarding what you might fantasize about. First, if you couldn't be a writer, what would you be?

WW: I'd like to operate a very small brewery and make beer with taste. If I could start over, I might go into veterinary medicine. "Doc" is one of my nicknames.

MSW: I see. Is there someone whose writing you admire?

WW: I like the cleanness of Ross Macdonald's writing, the vitality of Henry Miller, and the precision of Eudora Welty. Someday I will write a homage to Hemingway.

MSW: If there were some book in the world that you wish you could have written, what would it be?

WW (long pause): Maybe... (second

long pause) *The Canterbury Tales*. I realize that may not be a popular answer. But it's the truth.

MSW: Why that?

WW: It has everything — dignity, smut-tiness, humor, drama, beauty, and love. What else is there? Chaucer tried to wrap the world inside his writing. That's what I would like to do.

MSW: What would you like to accomplish in writing by, say, 1990?

WW: In ten years? I'd like to have written a book with the precision of a computer chip, the vitality of a cheerleader on speed, and which would be dignified, earthy, beautiful, and hilarious. I'd like to write a book that a person could read, wake up the next morning, and smile.

MSW: That's all?

WW (long pause): Yes, that's it. But, you know, I don't think too much about that kind of thing. The future has always taken care of itself. "The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

MSW: Really?


WW: Really.





Illustrated by Sabrina Jarema

The Lockbox and the Magic Monger

 n the way across the mountains, Nistranna lost her footing. She hung precariously from a ledge. There was something of anxious terror about her expression when Kerman hesitated in her retrieval.

He considered: It had been mighty inglorious, pushed around by an amazon who claimed him as slave simply because — strictly by fortune, mind you — she had beaten him at crossed swords. It was further ingratiating to be forced into sexual docility, for any aggressive act would be instantly construed as a challenge of his mistress' authority and dealt with accordingly. How simple it would be now, to stomp a finger. He could watch her fall, and be a free man once more. Certainly he did not need her to locate Joracin. Even supposing (only for the sake of argument) that Nistranna were the better tracker, or imagining Joracin more clever at covering his trail, Kerman happened to know the thief's destination. This information Kerman had slyly kept to himself.

If Joracin had already managed to open the amazon's mysterious box, and if he had already fenced the sure-to-be-valuable contents, then Kerman would squeeze a fair share from the knave — or possibly skewer him for the entire take.

After these uncouth ruminations, Kerman added to his thoughts: Nistranna did have saving factors. Chief among these was her complete and unadulterated lack

Jessica Amanda Salmonson

of inhibitions in details erotic, rendered imperfect only in that she disallowed him the same total unrestraint. Also, she was lovely: dark-skinned and amber-eyed and auburn-haired and soft and curvacious. Ah! The pity, if such perfection came to be crushed and mangled at the base of a cliff. There was, after all, so little beauty left upon the globe. Technology had an aeon before played succubus on the nape of the earth, until magic sprung anew to thrust a wooden peg into science's vampirish heart. The millennia since had not yet restored the world. The one common trait of much upon the variegated planet was its sheer and nearly uniform ugliness.

All these thoughts flashed by in the twinkling of an eye. In another twinkle, he considered the personal loss of face he would experience were Chance to be his liberator, and not his clever, roguish self. In the city of Yacara, he would have ample opportunity to alter his circumstance of servitude. There was even the likable prospect of turning the tables on the dark woman, by the rules of her own customs — customs to which she adhered religiously.

Thus the decision was made, and Kerman helped the woman up, commending himself verbosely for having saved her endangered life. She glared at him silently, never mentioning that she could easily have climbed back onto the ledge alone, had he not towered over her threateningly those few moments.

Beyond this incident, there was nothing untoward about their journey. She tracked Joracin right to the point of a stone highway. There, the track was obliterated by other travelers. But the road led only to Yacara.

"Had he cause to venture to that city?" she asked, pinching Kerman's ear until he winced. Conjuring a vast show of innocence and ignorance, Kerman pretended no knowledge on this topic. Nistranna let go of his ear, and said:

"He will not manage to open the box. It is sealed by magic. So his choices are limited: He could hock it sealed, but would get naught but the value of the woodcraft, for none would believe a rogue if he promised the content to be valuable. More likely, he will consider enlisting the service of a magic-monger, who might, by grave misfortune, unseal the lock."

"Or," suggested Kerman, "he might simply burst it upon a stone."

That suggestion, for secreted reasons, caused Nistranna to shudder. She stated cryptically:

"In such an event, Yacara would cease to be a city. Onward!" She poked him with the hilt of his own confiscated sword. "His trail is still hot. There may yet be time."

YACARA HAD the odor of smike and the look of a ghetto. Bleak walls of boarded windows suggested non-tenancy, but the city was overcrowded, and people lived in the dark beyond those sealed panes. Housing was at such premium that beggars and their children slept in the slimed gutters by the dozen score, constantly underfoot. Nistranna stepped carefully between their ranks, whereas Kerman squashed fingers without regret.

Nistranna purchased fruit for herself and her slave. She had him taste it first — for it was known that Yacarans were not noted farmers and found greater reward selling wild and poisonous harvests. After a sale of that sort, a vendor's confederate would stalk the customers until they dropped dead, then rob the corpse.

The fruit Nistranna chose was not poisonous. Kerman recognized varieties which were indeed deadly — but, being the tester, he warned his keeper away from these.

Poisonous or no, the purchase was yet vile: overripe and rotted, fuzzed with mold. It was the best the city had to offer.

They dropped their pits and seeds in beggars' cups, to be cracked open so the insides could be devoured by those starving poor.

Nistranna also purchased information from numerous brokers. These dealers generally dealt cheap. But when asked about magic-mongers, they charged inflated prices, or more often evicted their potential customers. What overpriced answers Nistranna did manage to obtain were so steeped in allegory that she was frustrated if not outrightly cheated. She stalwartly refused Kerman's intervention, though he had greater city expertise. It was all he could do to remain properly passive when one broker gave his costly clue in rhyme — a ghastly bit of versifying this tale shall not record.

So by the end of the day, Nistranna was a sight poorer, and nearly as ignorant as when she started. She had uncovered only one name: Bulmigar. She had no reliable clue as to the whereabouts of this most ill-reputed magician, nor an iota of information regarding a mustachioed rogue with carven lock-box.

As night approached, they needed to consider lodging. That was something the metropolis could not easily nor well provide, especially to folk already cheated of their funds.

Their best course, Nistranna decided, was to exceed the city limits and pitch their tent (which Nistranna had hauled about on her back all day, her slave professing an ailment of the spinal column) outside the walls. It was difficult for Kerman to argue her out of this plan, since the advice of a rightfully passive partner is always to be rigorously ignored by the aggressor of the pair. Such was the custom.

"But Nistranna, sweet master and mistress," Kerman pleaded, "outside the city walls there are only bandits, outcasts and lepers!"

"Better than to sleep in smike," she retorted, lifting a foot from the sticky cobbles and taking another step toward the city gates.

"But Nistranna, noble amazon and protectress," entreated the swordless swordsman. "We will be murdered in our tent, and lack all privacy for sport."

"I am weary of the sport anyway," she replied, boredom in her accent. "And you shall stand guard over the tent."

"But Nistranna, lovely negress of ineffable wisdom!" He threw himself on the filthy ground before her feet. "We would be cudgeled and robbed by ghouls and cretins!"

"I have already been robbed," said she. "First by your friend, more recently by these city merchants whose ways confound a forest woman. And what have you to lose to robbers?"

Her query was not intended to be answered, but Kerman's face went instantly blank and innocent, which rendered him immediately suspect. His sudden silence alone was enough to reveal him.

"You have been holding out!" she charged.

"No, mistress, no! I am penniless! Busted!"

But she was atop him, wrestling in the street, toothless old beggar-hags grinning at the sight. She checked all his pockets, and finally his cock-sheath. In the latter she found a long purse.

"Aha!" she exclaimed, unbuttoning the sheath. "And you purported to be perpetually aroused!"

The pouch was full of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and other doodads of universal value. "Doubtlessly stolen," she reprimanded. "No matter. A slave has nothing which does not belong to his master. Now! We shall not sleep outside the walls after all. To the hostel!"

Kerman lamented the content of his sheath, partly because Nistranna was so

inept at dickering that she would have squandered the minute fortune in one more day, well before Kerman could steal it back and escape from bondage. But his concern was soon rechanneled by her choice of hostels.

"Not this one, mistress! Please!"

She eyed him, and the building. It was the first she had seen without a no-vacancy placard.

"And why not?"

"Thugs! It is a house of thugs!"

"And how would you know that? Come on!"

Regretfully, he followed. Sure enough, there were thugs, and one thug in particular: Joracin.

"So! You weaselly little conspirator! You knew where he was all along!"

"No, I swear!"

She walloped her ward alongside the head. He suffered more from the jeers of fellow rogues than from the cuffing. These other rogues had already claimed most of the existing floorspace in the filthy hostel. Kerman avoided stomping fingers, for this breed commanded more respect than beggars.

Joracin lay in one of the beds — a thing so bug-ridden that it was actually less preferable than the floor. The box was nowhere to be seen, and Joracin himself appeared to be dead. Closer inspection proved him still alive, but for some reason stiff and paralyzed. One of the resident brigands informed that the man arrived the night before, frightened and furtive, took to the bed, and had not moved since. Two wandering Grey Men, said this fellow, had earlier that day considered dismembering him and selling him as catsmeat, but business took them elsewhere.

A chigger was burrowing in the corner of Joracin's eye. His eyes were open, staring. His breast rose slowly, his breath almost stilled. Kerman bent to his face and asked, "Joracin! Where is the box?"

Joracin heard. He made a little grunting noise in response.

Angry that the incompetent thief had apparently lost the loot, Nistranna pushed Kerman out of the way and began to slap and berate the paralyzed man. Joracin began to cough and move, though not so much of the latter. He rasped in a difficult voice: "Bulmigar!"

"You gave my box to Bulmigar?" she squealed, and pulled a fist far back.

"N-no!" the stricken man said hoarsely. "I did not!" Nistranna lowered her fist for the time being. She drew him up by the collar until his face nearly touched hers. She growled at him balefully:

"Foolish thief, I will tell you: Whosoever picks the lock unleashes death on this country! You thought to find a case of treasure? The lock-box was entrusted to me by a medicine mage who snared a virulent plague therein! I was to take it to the Poisoned Sea, there to sink it in the deeps. But now . . . if I've failed my mission . . ."

Her lips began to quiver as though failure of her duty were a fate too cruel. Suddenly she began shaking the thief with a vengeance. "Tell me where it is!" she shouted, and let him loose at last. He fell back with a thump on the hard bed.

"H-hid it," said Joracin.

"Where!" Nistranna demanded, her fist balled tight once more.

"S-s-safe! Bulmigar . . . h-he would not s-s-sell the k-key. T-tell him h-he c-can have it. Only, l-let me walk again."

The fear in Joracin's eyes was real and great, Kerman saw. Though his fellow rogue had been an actor by profession before becoming a thief, Kerman knew the difference between feigned fright and the genuine article. Furthermore, Joracin's fear was not wrought entirely by the amazon's fist. Kerman placed a tentative

hand near the volatile woman's elbow.

"He is offering a deal," Kerman intervened cautiously. Joracin's eyes peeled back with hope, eyeing his one-time road companion. "If Bulmigar leaves Joracin like this, he has nothing to gain by telling us where he has hidden the box. We will have to deal with Bulmigar. Bulmigar gets the box from Joracin once the paralysis is broken, then we steal the box from Bulmigar if you truly value it above our ability to walk."

"I hope you are a better thief than this fool, then!" said Nistranna. Then of the spell-victim she asked harshly: "Where can we find him?"

"T-Temple of the Dauths!"

WITHOUT PARTAKING of sleep - though not allowed refund of the advanced nightly rate — Nistranna herded Kerman along to the Temple of the Dauths. Kerman was greatly dispirited as they trekked along the moist, grim city streets toward the bleak, black towers raised against the moon.

The temple was an eye-boggling bit of gothic architecture, impressive and imposing, replete with gargoyles snarling out from the eaves, and stone monsters perched menacingly at every window and door.

"I'll wait here," offered the slave.

She kicked his butt.

The main chamber was vast, musty, apparently rarely used. The ceiling was intricately carved. Black candles provided what little light there was. The interior had the appearance of a church — for devil worship — with every shadowed niche featuring a different and more gruesome deity, carved in grey stone or black wood.

Beyond the rows of benches stood a pulpit. Beyond that: an open coffin, with a lacy black shroud laid within. The occupant had either gone for a walk, or was not yet dead — and quite possibly unaware that his next home was readied. Beyond the coffin: an altar whose tiers were stained with blood.

"Might this humble servant of your beautifulness, this doting admirer, this severely infatuated and devoutly faithful dung-ball of an undeserving dog, make one request?" Kerman asked quietly.

"Ask," she hissed. Their voices echoed hollowly through the temple's interior.

"My sword." It had been tied to the pack she carried. She set down her load in the sinister synagogue and, measuring her surroundings, made a rare decision:

"You may have it. Feeble as your abilities are, they might yet come in handy."

She let him fetch the sword himself. Its familiar weight lent purpose to his scabbard and gait. With it, he felt instantly more in command. He gazed at Nistranna somewhat meaningfully, behind her back.

A rather high-pitched voice from an indeterminate spot above their heads interrupted the deathly silence.

"You will not need those," it said. And both Kerman's and Nistranna's rapiers clattered to the floor — scabbard, belt, and all. The voice commanded sternly, "Step forward!"

Kerman reached toward the floor, but a tiny bolt of electricity shot from the sword-hilt to his fingers. He yelped and jumped forward to stand a little to the rear of his shield, Nistranna. He experienced a new sensation: fear. He had been a wise coward all his life, but not a quaking, frightened rabbit. This subjugation business was making him into a pansy — and he feared that, too. It was something that attached itself to a body like a parasite, this dependency and helplessness. He had to get out from under it!

Presently, however, there were other problems brewing. He must perform sur-

vive one danger at a time. Bulmigar had stepped from behind the podium. The dwarf had been standing there the whole time.

He was of oriental cast, with a long braid hanging out from under a skull-cap and down his back. He had a childlike smile as well as size, and he bowed in cordial greeting.

"Allow me to save your breaths," said Bulmigar helpfully. "The thief Joracin has asked you to bring me a message: If I will let him walk again, he will use his newfound mobility to bring me the chest he described. You are astounded at this precognition? Bulmigar sees all, knows all."

If that were so, thought Kerman, they did not have one chance in thirteen hells of stealing the box from Bulmigar once it was in his possession. Not that Kerman had seen much value to that enterprise in the first place . . . unless the box were stolen from Joracin before he fulfilled his bargain. Nistranna was not terribly bright about cities and city magicians, if she honestly expected to escape the former with the booty of the latter.

"I regret to say that your errand is without purpose," Bulmigar continued. "For the thespian Joracin is now entirely under my spell, as you will see momentarily. Ah! There . . ."

The cathedral doors opened, and there stood the mustachioed thief, eyes glazed and unblinking, shoulders hunched — and the amazon's box in his arms.

"In ancient times," began Bulmigar, "there were holidays and celebrations in which 'friends' — mythical animals to us today — gave 'presents' to friends. As it happens, today is my forty-seventh birthday. I would therefore be honored to consider the lock-box my birthday gift from all of you."

He reached behind the pulpit and produced a communion tray with four goblets of bubbling red liquid. With these, he descended to the main auditorium. The zombie lay down his load on command, and mechanically took one goblet. Nistranna and Kerman each took a proffered glass. The dwarf magician took the last.

"A toast!" he said. "Many happy returns!"

Not if I can help it, thought Kerman, and managed to whisper a warning: "Drink this stuff and you will end up like Joracin. He never could turn down an offer of wine — ruined a perfectly good acting career."

"Many happy returns," echoed Nistranna, and held the glass high. They all raised the thick, crimson fluid to their lips, Bulmigar watching the newcomers carefully.

In an unpredictable flash, Nistranna had thrown the brew in their host's face. Bulmigar threw up his arms in a warding gesture, but took the fluid full in the face.

"Horrors!" he cried. "Horror of horrors! I'll never get it off! Never!"

The red-faced dwarf stormed towards the offender, and Nistranna crouched to attack. Kerman rolled his eyes at the audacity, and leapt upon his sword. It discharged sparks and rattled his skeleton, but he held it firm, and stood to slay the wimp magician if he could.

But dwarf and amazon were locked in battle. For some bizarre reason, the magician was not using his magic at all. He dared pit brute force against a woman four times his size.

And was enjoying every minute of it.

They wrestled a bare moment before Nistranna had him pinned like a helpless baby.

"By the customs of my tribe," she warned through gritting teeth, "if I defeat you, you are my slave."

"Yes! Yes!" the magic-monger promised, and kicked with furious impotence.

She slapped him silly.

Meanwhile, the zombie alone had finished the red liquid. It coursed through his system, and when the critical moment of mind-control came, Bulmigar was preoccupied. He forgot to maintain dominance over Joracin's faculties.

The zombie-Joracin raised the lock-box from the floor, lifted it above his head.

"No!" cried Nistranna, looking up from her match.

"My present!" whined Bulmigar.

Nistranna ducked aside, and the box came down on the dwarf's head. Box and head alike crushed, as though neither were thicker than eggshells. The demon Vengeance had given Joracin superhuman strength.

White smoke seeped out of the broken box, instantly engulfing the amazon. She gasped once, then fell across the dwarf. The gaseous vapor then rushed up Joracin's legs, engulfing him as well. He fell. The stuff expanded and flowed, but Kerman jumped back from it.

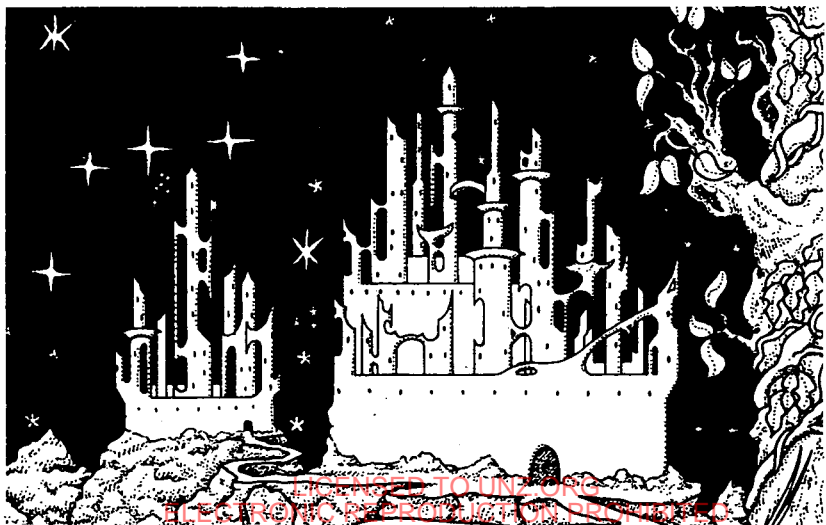
He was out the door with extreme haste. He ran as fast as his long legs would carry him. "Alas, Nistranna!" he said aloud, staying ahead of the rapid flow of whiteness which spread through the streets. It slew the beggars asleep in the gutters. It seeped up into the tenements. "Alas my bag of jewels!" he further lamented, panting. He was near the city gates.

"And good riddance, Yacara," he proclaimed, jogging down the nighted highway. He realized the swift, silent, white death would strike all the city that night. Kerman reflected: Magic might yet purify this polluted planet!

Jessica Amanda Salmonson

Jessica Amanda Salmonson is a swordswoman of the Omori school of *iaido* or "Way of the Centered Katana" (the samurai sword). "I spend less and less time reading contemporary fantasy or science fiction and reading more and more history; because I feel the actual roles women have filled in the past are incredibly more varied and exciting than current fictional roles." At various SF conventions she has given the slide lecture "The Swordswoman of Art,

History and Legend." Her short fiction has appeared in or is slated for *Dragon Tales*, *The Berkley Showcase*, *Fantasy Tales*, *Weirdbook* and many others. Her first novel, *The Tomoe Gozen Saga* about a 13th Century woman samurai, will appear in June from Ace Books. She plans to write more adventures about the lucky, roguish Kerman.



The impossibly huge white mechanism seemed to float, weightless, in a darkness of space.

Deep within, a muted throbbing power source ministered intermittently to the controlled environment held captive by massive self-sealing portals. Level upon level of odd shaped Carrier vessels shivered silently in the bleak fridity of the holds. Within one such Carrier a tiny yellow saucer-shaped Fighter craft nestled, as if for warmth, beneath its brooding Commanding ship.

Yellow 1 Fighter pilot slumbered on within the cold confines of his tiny craft. His slow steady breathing gave no hint of his action-packed dreams.

He was, in quick succession:

A karate fiend . . . hatcheting bodies in two with his slashing hands!

A weaponless Viking . . . charging into the enemy, literally using their own arms against them!

A helmeted fullback . . . exploding through the opposition with all the courtesy of a hundred-and-twenty-mile-an-hour locomotive!

The dream sequence snapped off . . . his breathing stilled . . . an anomalous shudder was whispering subliminally through the structural members of his tiny craft.

His inner ear triggered . . . eyes flicked open . . . snapped into focus and scanned the anomaly attributes already being displayed and updated by the never-sleeping computer. Acceleration, angle, and frequency deviations integrated within his mind.

"Action!" he gloated, "this could be it!"

He leered optimistically as he shrugged out of his electric sleeping suit into the icy cold of the cabin and into the familiar constraints of his Command chair. He examined the displayed anomaly signature intently.

Were either of the giant Yellow or Red Command ships simply being relocated within the hold of their Carrier?

"Negative, no signature match," he mumbled in answer to his questioning thought. A slight smile softened his broad competent features.

Was their Carrier, perhaps, just being moved to another docking location within the huge white vessel that he regarded as a Base Depot ship?

"A probable negative," he mused noting, on the status display, that he had been 'false alarmed' fifteen times since his last combat action. No matter though, he was possessed of that diamond hard fighter pilot optimism that never shatters, not even when it is screaming out of post crash tapes. Fully alert now his ears, sensing the pressure dip, anticipated the computer display by the merest fraction of a second.

The next input was pivotal.

If a pressure bounce, then, 'false alarm,' and he would resecure the ship and climb back into the sack. Sometimes, during these 'false alarms,' other Carriers, huge alien shapes, would stealthily slip in and out through the massive portals of the Depot ship that housed them all.

But this time it was for real.

His Carrier suddenly lifted, silently performed an exit maneuver through the

The Action

yawning portal, and went into a holding pattern just outside of the Depot ship.

A tersely coded cue sent the Carrier off on a randomly deceptive course that brought it unerringly to its prescribed combat zone destination.

During the trip, Base-to-Command-to-Freighter Comm links flickered with brief urgency through their verification checks. Firing circuits were livened and tested. All was in readiness for the coming action.

The Carrier, after a jolting landing, tastelessly burped a mix of Yellow and Red Command and Fighter craft rudely out onto a barren plain and whispered away.

Thunder, befitting a combat zone, grumbled menacingly in the distance. A pall of acrid smoke drifted lazily through the air. The table-flat plain shook fearfully from time to time. The Fighter pilot's Status display told him that the outer skin temperature of his one-man craft was rising. Perhaps the rise was due to the quad of alien suns, that hung high overhead, glaring out of the zenith.

While the fighter craft aligned themselves on their respective launch pads, the Yellow Command ship honored the objective with a unique 0 range/0 degree location. This put the launch pad complexes at 30/-80. The objective was somewhat less than single-boost distance away. It was a towering, red colored, cylindrical structure without visible access.

Primary mission: Secure the objective before the enemy does.

Secondary mission: Gather and relay data about the objective back to Command.

A third, and unofficial mission, was to 'hit 'em and hurt 'em as hard and as often and as bad as you can!' Kamikaze attacks on their Command ships and 'no-flinch' head-on collisions between Fighter craft were SOP.

Yellow 1 Fighter pilot, now chafing and impatient for action, summoned up vivid memories of his combat training and began his mental psych-up chant.

EEEE YAW!!! EEEE YAW!!!

From the guts . . . get it out . . . harder, harder!!

WE ARE THE JUMPING JACKS!!!

Boost it up . . . boost it up . . . higher, higher!!

Frying bursts of audio link static accompanied him.

HOO HA!!! HOO HA!!!

Sound it off . . . rip it out . . . louder, louder!!

WE'RE GONNA BREAK THEIR BACKS!!!

Chew 'em up . . . spit 'em out . . . meaner, meaner!!

His body was juiced to the hilt . . . quivering with adrenalin.

"STATUS!!!" blared the audio link.

"YELLOW 1, READY!!!" he barked.

"2, 3, 4!!" cadenced instantly out of the audio link followed quickly by a shivery, "Red 1, ready, 2, 3, 4," at a lower level.

A small corner of his mind wondered what he was hooked on most, killing the enemy or dumb idiotic chanting and adrenalin highs.

Yellow Command loomed suddenly overhead, choking the protesting structure of his small craft with a maximum range boost.

He was launched.

Richard Anker

Hook

**Chew 'em up . . . spit 'em out . . .
meaner, meaner!! His body was
juiced to the hilt . . .**

THE BOOST technique had made available the perfect weapon, intelligent and reusable missiles, to the field Commanders. There was also the added bonus of absolute control over the supercharged, and sometimes obstreperous Fighter pilots. A Commander was, in effect, a computer-assisted battle complex whose six-shooter could easily fire a thousand rounds from a single loading.

Such a man was Commander Theodore L. Lee, Zone of operations, Commander-in-Charge, Yellow and Red forces.

Commander Lee stood erect, calmly alert, in the CIC area of his Yellow Command ship. His Executive Officer watched the Commander closely via a video link from a similar area in the Red Command ship. Commander Lee had that taut-skinned skeletal look that is common among combat personnel who bear their heavy battle burdens too long and too far.

Luminous gray eyes gazed, with disconcerting directness, out of a tanned gleaming skull. Rumor had it that the Commander could, at a hundred meters, still a trooper's bawdy joke with a glance. A twitch of the Commander's neat gray mustache and, within nine, the trooper would be at the Commander's side, at the ready.

The Commander's Exec, ever aware, knew this to be not 'just a rumor.'

The Commander scanned the Strategy displays, lingered briefly on one, then glanced alertly at his Exec.

The Exec nodded imperceptibly. . . the attack was on.

The Fighter pilot saw the objective slip under his port bow.

"Access is through the top . . . enemy Blue and White in launch pattern at 26/100 . . . enemy launching a White!" he snapped as he fought his craft down to a bone-jarring landing. He saw the White loop over and veer violently to the left to avoid crashing into the wall of the objective. Suddenly he felt Yellow Command boosting him, again, toward the objective, but he suffered the same fate as the White. Tricky air currents, perhaps. He landed with his weapons trained almost directly on the White, who frantically boosted out. Yellow Command, then, boosted him up and over, but before he could drop into the huge structure, a White appeared from nowhere on a direct collision course with him.

This was the one-on-one 'action' he hungered for. . . yea, even slavered for. To his super-hyped senses it now moved like a slow motion cartoon. Grimly frozen, he watched the other pilot flinch at the very last moment, and flick away, smashing him with nothing more than an ear-shattering roar of Mach diamonds.

There! Another Yellow had come in and was at the base of the structure. Then a White careened crazily past them in an overshoot. Another Yellow did likewise. The boost packets were too strong. Somehow the computers were misjudging. A White sailed by, good range, erratic course, and a lousy landing. A Red came by, same problem. The appearance of the Red meant that the back-up team had been activated. A Blue fell short. Then a Red, ignoring the objective completely, crashed into the enemy's Blue launch complex. A White came in fast, crashing into one of his own craft, while a Red was faked out, again, by the tricky wind currents. A White command ship tried, without avail, to make it with a Blue Fighter. A Red and a White both had near misses twice in a row. Same for a Blue and a Yellow, boosting all the way from their respective launch pads.

Suddenly, after two complicated bracketing passes, a Red was in, right down the stack!

The background noise of the audio link was abruptly submerged by an urgent data stream concerning the interior of the objective. The data stream was chopped short when a Blue dropped down the stack on the very first try.

Blue Command had monitored the bracketing exercise, deduced the anomaly pattern, and pitched a strike . . . all within the blink of an eye.

Both sides had progressed from pad launches to field launches with frustratingly close misses. Then . . . another Red was in . . . the data stream burped into existence again . . . and yet another Red was in. Then a Blue crashed into the Red Command ship and had it floundering. Still needed was the lone Red in the far distance. Yellow Command boosted the Red twice the ordinary range almost into the objective and then, on the next try, right in. The Red Command ship was being sacrificed. The count was four Reds to one Blue. An instant later a Blue and a White settled into the objective, almost evening the odds. Then suddenly, all the Whites were in. The odds had been tilted the other way by two Blues. A Yellow was in, then a Blue. Yellow Command tried a tricky double launch and blew it. Blue Command pulled its lone Blue from its pinning action on the Red Command ship and casually launched the last Blue into the objective.

The battle was over.

A Blue/White win . . . a Yellow/Red loss . . . definite and final.

COMMANDER LEE stood quietly in the CIC area of the Yellow Command ship. He glared at his Exec's image.

"Kill ratio and casualties logged and exchange of prisoners under way, Sir."

The Commander's glance lingered.

Within moments the Exec eased into the Commander's cabin, laid a sheaf of computer summaries near the Commander, then silently set two glasses and a small exquisitely formed flagon of brandy on one of the computer consoles. A case of such brandy equated easily to a completely equipped Fighter craft on the black market.

The Commander scanned the summaries. He held one page for a moment, orienting it slightly to the left where his Exec was now standing in attentive silence. The Exec scanned the sheet. It contained the names of ten enemy Commanders. The Exec's dark eyes narrowed.

"Commander Win, Sir."

Commander Lee's eyes lingered on the list.

"Commander Win, K.S., Sir," the Exec amended, "in their culture the surname is first."

Commander Lee turned and faced the door. The Exec replaced the brandy with an equally expensive oriental liqueur, stationed himself to the left of the door, and stood silently.

Two soft knocks sounded. The Exec's eyebrows arched ever so slightly. This small courtesy was not often extended to a losing Commander. Through the years, however, the takeover of a losing Command ship had acquired a subtle formality that was really only appreciated by men of combat.

Commander Win stepped through the door. In one easy sweep he saw the Exec at attention, the liqueur flagon, the computer summaries, and Commander Lee, also at attention.

The door closed. Commander Win stood, rigid and silent, facing Lee.

"Commander Win," the Exec intoned, paused, then, "Commander Lee."

Commander Win, without moving a muscle, communicated his keen delight of the moment. Then, standing easy, Win responded, "Yes, thank you, I believe I will." Perfect English spoken with the delicate softness of a tongue that knows many languages.

The Exec filled each of the glasses precisely half full and exited without a sound.

"Please, Commander, a sip and a word." Again the perfect English. Commander Win picked up the two glasses and solemnly proffered one to Lee.

The guest-host relationship had been smoothly reversed.

Win sipped perceptively. "Most excellent, most proper," he murmured. He leafed through the computer summaries. "Ah yes, polar instead of grid coordinates, that gave you a slight edge," he exclaimed, "but I was lucky, good field position enabled me to capitalize almost instantly on your anomaly analysis."

Win sipped on, ignoring the fact that Lee had not yet sipped, even once. "Interesting, how our computers processed the same data, but in different ways . . . and from different viewpoints." Win turned to the video screen framing the Exec's face. "Exec."

"Yes, Sir."

"Link Yellow and White Command computers . . . display an integrated picture of all data relevant to the objective."

"Yes, Sir." A half completed picture of the objective immediately snapped into view. It was rapidly being filled in with data updates.

Win's eyes beamed in acknowledgement of the Exec's efficient anticipation. "My compliments, Commander, you have developed a fine Exec. Yes," Win continued, "you seem to have him hooked on efficiency." Win sipped and mused. "I once thought I was hooked on winning, but self-contemplation revealed the real hook to be competition." Win sipped again. "And what is Commander Lee's hook?" Win queried thoughtfully glancing at Lee.

Lee was gazing intently at the nearly completed picture.

"Cerebral control . . . no . . . perceptive control . . . perhaps," Win continued. Win turned to Lee.

Lee, having just completed a series of gestures, pointing to himself, Win, and the display, was now eyeing the Exec intently.

Bold block letters began to form a legend beneath the nearly completed picture of the objective.

T H E O . . .

Commander Lee gestured with his thumb and forefinger.

The legend vanished and a new series of letters began to form.

T E D L . . .

"Commander Lee," Win said, "we shall now drink to your hook, whatever it is." Win raised his glass.

Lee raised his in salute, sipped, and shifted his gaze to the display. His mustache quivered slightly.

Win's eyes, drawn almost hypnotically to the display, suddenly bugged and slitted twice in rapid succession. "With your permission, Commander Lee," Win said, and, as he eyed the Exec, Win punched a hole in the air with his forefinger and then deleted it with a wave of his hand.

The display altered subtly.

The Commanders smiled, clinked their glasses, sipped again and gazed at the, now completed, full color picture. What they saw was the objective, a vividly red-colored cylinder, and two legends, one in ghostly white on the surface of the cylinder and the other in neon green, just below the structure.

The legends were:

CAMPBELL'S
TOMATO
SURPRISE

and:

TED L LEE
WIN K S

"GOOD GOD!! You keep your Winks in your 'fridge? . . . the freezing compartment? How weird!!" The verbose guest puffed heavily on his acrid smelling pipe.

"I have a feeling that it is restful for them in there," the host replied, easing the huge portal shut, "and, I, as loser, have provided you, a witless writer, who wins by dumb luck, a story idea."

"By the way," the guest puffed, "that Commander Lee, what was his hook?"

"It should be obvious," the host replied, "and by the way, had I won, that foul pipe of yours would have been trashed by now."

"Well?" puffed the guest.

"Well," replied the host, "he didn't smoke a pipe, did he?"

"No."

"He didn't get frustrated and pound the table, did he?"

"No."

"And according to my simulated genuine fairy tale, he didn't talk a lot, did he?"

"No . . . not one word, in fact."

"Therefore," the host smiled, "he wasn't a pipe smoking, table pounding blowhard who's all 'talk' and no 'action,' now was he?"

"'Zero' talk . . . and 'all' action," said the pipe smoker, "now that is really very, very good!" The host/loser endured another puff of smoke that exclaimed, "Of course! . . . he had a hundred percent ACTION HOOK." The guest chuckled, "Too bad he didn't have my 'kill ratio.'"

"Smokey the Bear wouldn't rub it in," sighed the loser.

"Nice game, anyway," rubbed the guest, "but the conclusion was obvious."

"Why?" resigned the host.

"Because, I had 'Commander Win' on my side, dummy."

The host's eyes rolled upward. "This just has to be the bitter fairy tale end," he mumbled sorely. The host then recovered his cool and said with determination, force, and clarity, "THE END!"

"There is one other thing," the guest puffed.

"Shut uppa your bigga mouth!! We can't talk after the story is ended . . . it is forbidden . . . a writer like you ought to know that!"

"But I'd give anything. . ."

"Silence!!!" the host shouted, then, "Did you say . . . 'anything?' "

"Yes."

"Your word of honor as a Junior Star Trekker (Junior Lensman for the 'middle-aged' folk)?"

"That's dirty pool, but yes."

"Yes, isn't it?" smiled the host, "and the 'anything' is that you will trash your pipe."

Looking mortally wounded, the guest agreed. "I will convey my pipe to the trash pile," he gloomed, then, smiling, "but in return I get to see the 'Reader's comment.' "

"No way," the host frowned, "this is a family rated mag."

"I said 'see his note to the Editor,' not 'hear his personal comment.' "

"This thing may not even rate a note," The host was frowning again.

"Well . . . now, just leave us have a look see, okay?"

"Okay."

Reader's note 1:

"Tomato surprise stories are dumb!"

Editor's note 1:

"Buy this thing and retittle it:
THE TOMATO SURPRISE HOOK."

Reader's note 2:

"Clumsy T.S. stories are clumsy and dumb!"

Editor's final note:

"TRASH IT!!"

"Well," puffed the guest, "I've kept my part of the bargain, and I must say that living in a trash barrel isn't all that bad." The guest nudged the sullen host. "Who knows, you might learn to enjoy a good ripe cigar butt now and again."

"Only on one condition."

"What's that?"

"It has just 'got' to have some kind of cotton-pickin' 'end!' "

The Commanders smiled and drained their glasses.

Yellow 1 Fighter pilot grinned and snuggled deeper into his electric sleeping suit and began to dream. . . .

Richard Anker

"By golly! Isn't he just the ugliest, bawlingest, red-facedest, little sucker you've ever seen?" So, probably, spoke my Danish immigrant parents of me, March, 1918.

I distinctly remember the feeling that I was just a little fellow wobbling around on a little planet which, in turn, was wobbling around a little sun.

Oh well, so much for little. Now let's talk about big. I remember the big oceans and ships that I was on, courtesy of Uncle.

General Patton, who was a big man, probably never knew what I, one of his little soldiers, did for and to his big Third Army.

Returning from the Big War, I was promptly matrimonialed by a Beautiful American Marine lady in 1945 and am still stunned, and a touch married.

Attended our honeymoon and Purdue University simultaneously, matriculating a little now and then and getting a BSEE in

1949 plus several credits towards an MSEE.

Presently, and since leaving Purdue, I have been one of the lucky little workers enjoying the continuous paid vacation benefits of the big Aerospace Industry.

Happiness, to me, is first-class women, booze, weather, volleyball, and problem solving. To avoid alienation of any of the above, the order is of little importance.

You, now, must realize that I've also been well hooked on the problem of finding the near nonexistent chinks in the Editorial armor-plate that abounds.

Period.

P.S.

I've also stayed awake, without effort, through several UCLA writing workshops where I learned that you stop when the word numero equals 250.



THE FUTURE:

subject to change without notice

Special to AMAZING

by Brian M. Fraser

THE ONE SURE thing about tomorrow is that it will be different from today, if only in some infinitesimal way or in some minor development which will have major implications at some time in the future.

In preparing for this dynamic future, it is vital to be flexible, to become increasingly aware of alternative courses of action and to keep all our societal options open in order to avoid becoming 'locked in' to a 'dead-end' trend or technology.

Already, the shape of our world has been determined in large part by capabilities and uses of computers, a technological leap which was a result of the invention of the transistor just over 25 years ago.

And the acceleration of technological change, as pointed out by Alvin Tofler in his book *Future Shock*, is radically altering the nature of our society and will make it completely different five, ten or more years downstream.

Sometimes, it seems as though we are living in a fantastic world in which the values, institutions and surroundings we have been familiar with are undergoing constant metamorphosis each and every day into an unfamiliar, and somewhat frightening, future.

Indeed, it's almost as though science fiction readers and writers are the only ones really prepared to accept these changes since they have been reading for years about similar alternatives and the many possible forms of the future in SF novels, stories or films.

Because the SF author is particularly adept at depicting the believable fabric of these potential future societies through the sage selection of details from everyday

life with which we can relate or identify, and yet which indicate by subtle or major alterations that this world is very different from the life we know.

We are familiar with some of the revolutionary premises and ideas which appear in SF stories. These are often most effectively presented when it is shown how these would influence an individual, a single industry, the people who work in that business and all their customers — that is, the world-at-large.

And this can be simply demonstrated by applying SF's speculative imagination to a major industry today and one, we expect, that would continue on in the future. But it might be changed — a great deal.

Scenario of a Future

SF writer Robert A. Heinlein's first short story, for instance, concerned the impact of one plausible scientific development — the ability to tell exactly when a person might die — specifically on the life insurance business.

Titled "Lifeline," the 1939 story concerns the attempts of Dr. Hugo Pinero to gain acknowledgement and accreditation for the validity of his invention which, by some as-yet-undeveloped means, mapped the electrical discharges of an individual's life forces on some scale into the future. When no further electrical indications can be detected, that point marks the person's moment of death.

This is a pseudo-scientific explanation to be sure, but it is still useful in studying how the consequences of some discovery may have far-reaching ramifications in our society.

When rebuffed by the 'Academy of Science', Dr. Pinero sets up a business on his own, advising people on the date of their death. This allows them to cancel their life insurance policies if he foresees a long life ahead and to save the money which normally would have been used for insurance premiums. Or, if death is imminent, they can buy or increase their insurance coverage substantially, to the enlarged monetary benefit of their beneficiaries.

Since Pinero's machine, the chronovita-meter, detects the end of the lifeline but makes no distinction on the cause of death, e.g. it could be by an auto or other accident, it would be impossible for insurance company health officials to

certify the prospective client as uninsurable.

In this future scenario, this development has a substantial effect on business and profits of the life insurance companies so 'Amalgamated Life Insurance' has a court injunction served on the inventor to cease-and-desist in his, they claim, charlatanism.

Heinlein's protagonist responds by offering to test all the individuals within the Academy and, by the accumulating empirical evidence of deaths expected statistically and predicted definitely by his procedure on an individual basis over the next few months, to prove his method as a scientifically-reliable procedure.

In the end, the scientist-hero of this short science fiction story justifies himself and his mechanism in a very personal and dramatic conclusion which also results in the loss of his invention for this future society.

Although really only a minor story in itself, this piece of fiction is representative of the purpose of good science fiction and illustrative of one SF writer's technique of presenting it.

Taking one departure from the norm or a single development, and presenting, in a logical and consistent fashion, its ramifications on society, science fiction points out the different directions that the future may take. Hopefully, by assessing the future implications of current trends, we will make value judgements and choose technologies and philosophies which will lead to the most desirable futures.

The story is illustrative of Heinlein's narrative technique, a major contribution to the literature of science fiction, in which he presents the future in a very matter-of-fact manner. His fictional characters are actually living in this world and do not require involved explanations of how things work. So the reader isn't subjected to them either, resulting in a very believable future.

Even though humorist Ogden Nash can say, "Progress may have been all right once, but it's gone on too long", we know that the world will keep changing. And science fiction is one technique used by communicators to project possible alternatives and to comment, explicitly or implicitly, on their desirability.

What if . . . ? Exercises

One way in which SF examines possible

futures is to propose a What if . . . ? possibility and then carry out in fictional form an extrapolation of the resulting outgrowths.

For example, the following developments, if they came true, might significantly affect our arbitrary example of the life insurance industry of the future:

WHAT IF . . . the length of the human life was significantly lengthened by developments in medical or biological science?

WHAT IF . . . a matter transmission system was developed, completely eliminating the need for conventional transportation vehicles and effectively cutting automobile and airplane accidents to zero?

WHAT IF . . . the technique of cloning was developed to an advanced degree, enabling you to store copies of yourself which could be revived with all your memories intact if you died? Would you ever be truly said 'to die'? Could your beneficiaries ever collect? Would a new clone insurance industry spring up?

WHAT IF . . . an immortality potion were invented?

WHAT IF . . . a 'spare parts depository' or 'organ bank' would allow eternal replacement of worn-out parts of the body? Similarly, the development of rejection-free artificial hearts and other prosthetic devices?

WHAT IF . . . the world became so crowded that 'ethical suicide parlors' were a socially-acceptable and encouraged way to reduce the population? Would the survivors of these individuals who voluntarily killed themselves receive insurance benefits?

WHAT IF . . . a germ, bacteria or radiation mutation changed the relative life spans of men and women, shortening one and increasing the lifetime of the other sex drastically? How would this affect premiums?

SEVERAL OF these developments in the future may be possible, others improbable, some downright impossible. But most of them, at least within the confines of a fictional story situation, could be made to seem at least plausible.

And during that willing suspension of disbelief, we might learn how the future could change and how people and society as a whole might react to such changes.

Through the use of this analogy or example, we might also learn something about human nature and our own resistance or adaptability to change.

Science fiction looks towards the Day-After-Tomorrow. The immediate years ahead are unlikely to bring any of the way-out changes envisioned. But the potent SF writer is aware of the consequences that new developments will have on his invented universe and how these would in turn modify the global profile and structure of individual industries.

Then by fictionally showing how his protagonist copes with the very different aspects of his daily personal, social and business life, the author forcefully demonstrates to us the impermanence of some of our own beliefs, values and institutions. And so we gain a new perspective on our current world.

That is one of the most valuable and essential functions of good science fiction.

Satire

Satirical speculation is another fictional technique that certain SF writers sometimes use effectively to make pointed societal observations. Here, selected contemporary trends or industry traits take on exaggerated proportions when extrapolated into a Tomorrow World.

One definition of the purpose of a satire comes from Lester del Rey, who is now Fantasy Editor for DEL REY BOOKS in New York.

"Well, to me, a satire, in science fiction at least, is something that takes a thing that does exist in our society and exaggerates it until it becomes ludicrous to an extent.

"But you don't point out that it's ludicrous," adds del Rey with emphasis, "you just go ahead and write about it."

He continues: "I suppose a satire, properly-speaking, is always just a matter of exaggeration of things that are, usually to show the dangers of them."

Lester del Rey's comments on the use of satire in SF are especially appropos since, in the mid-1950's, under the joint pen-name 'Edson McCann', he collaborated with Frederik Pohl on *PREFERRED RISK*, a novel about the insurance industry in the future, our special sphere-of-society under review.

Here, science fiction was truly pointing

at one aspect (the insurance business) of the then-current world (at least Western society), extrapolating certain trends into the future, with considerable enlargement for both didactic and comedic effect.

Science fiction doesn't always or even often use a specific industry example as del Rey & Company did here, but it was doing so at this time. Fred Pohl had already done an advertising satire ("Gravy Planet" in the *GALAXY* magazine version, *THE SPACE MERCHANTS* as a novel) plus others with Cyril Kornbluth.

When I interviewed him recently, editor del Rey recounted the genesis of *PREFERRED RISK*:

"Well, the basic idea was Frederik's. He had been doing a bunch of satirical novels for Gold (H.L. Gold, editor of *GALAXY SF* magazine). This time, we were only supposed to do a novelette which would run around 18,000 words. We'd done another novelette together and it had worked very well. So I went out to his place and we sat down and literally knocked off 18,000 words. It wasn't supposed to be very important, and it wasn't a very important novelette.

"Then Horace Gold took a look at it and said: 'I don't want it as a novelette, I want it as a novel because I have a story contest running and I have not seen a submission to the story contest that I like. If you will do this novel, I will buy it for the story contest.' Well, at that time, \$6500 prize money was worthwhile. So we went back and scratched our heads and we both added things to it, helter-skelter. And we wrote it as a novel — with a great deal of difficulty," del Rey adds, "because neither one of us writes the same way that the other one does. He likes to see what happens at the end of a story; I have to know what happens at the end of the story.

"And then there was the McCarthy hearings on at the time, which interrupted us a lot; and there were important canasta games to be played at night which interrupted us a lot; and we found a bit over here and there but we got it done. What kind of a novel it is, I'm not sure myself."

Plotting Partners

Because of H.L. Gold's requirements, however, the satiric collaborators had to expand their fictionalized future of

insurance in our world from a novelette to a full-length novel.

How did they do this?

"Well, the first thing we did," says del Rey, "was to agree that we had a very minor character in there who had to play a major role. He was Zorch who was the man who could beat the insurance companies because he was capable of growing any part of himself. At least it was a theoretically possible thing."

They called him 'the human starfish' and he was capable of re-generating any limb which was cut off. So this biological 'freak' kept throwing himself into situations where he would be 'de-limbed' and then collecting from the insurance companies (who couldn't refuse to cover him) for his loss of an arm or leg. In fact, the novel begins with an uncomprehending protagonist who watches as Zorch taunts insurance company security staff and then throws himself in front of a train.

But this wasn't the only change needed to add wordage to their story.

"Also, we made the involvement of the hero — if you want to call him that — much deeper; we gave him more connections with the insurance company; we made a background for him.

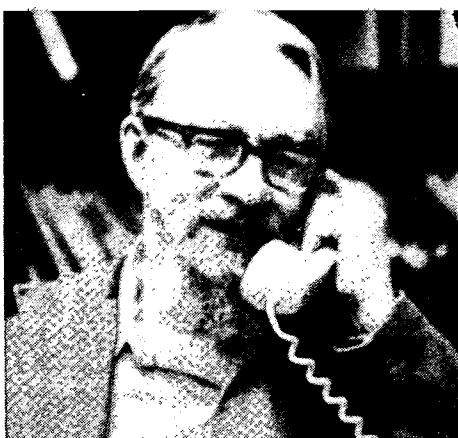
"The whole plot was deepened a great deal — there wasn't much of that to begin with, it was just a minor plot, over-and-done-with in the original novelette. And we had to develop that quite a bit. The ending, well, the ending became a much bigger ... and I can't remember how the original novelette went, come to think of it ... but I know the ending was much more detailed and longer.

"We took insurance and exaggerated it. But, of course, when you carry it into a novel, you begin to emphasize the story elements far more."

In joining authorial forces to write a novel, their collaborative technique was to type alternate chapters.

"We did alternate chapters and then he started and re-wrote the whole thing. And then, not for the magazine version but for the book version, I re-wrote the last two or three chapters completely and changed them around. It was a very complicated deal between the two of us," the New York editor remembers.

This fanciful fantasy was even set in Italy because, according to del Rey, "Fred Pohl had been in Italy during the war and he'd liked it and because he started the first



Lester del Rey Photo © 1980 Brian M. Fraser

BEHIND AN EINSTEINIAN PSEUDONYM

As one-half of the author pseudonym 'Edson McCann', Lester del Rey collaborated with Frederik Pohl in 1955 to write *PREFERRED RISK*, a satire on a future world controlled by insurance companies. But there's even a story behind the selection of their joint pen-name. Lester del Rey sets the scene for their choice of authorial alias:

"Well, I decided in my head that we were going to be $E = mc^2$ because we'd decided that we had to conceal our names, according to Gold. I decided that we were going to be a big physics engineer, doing secret work for the government and so forth and so on so they could not communicate with us in any way at all. And the way to do that, of course, is to find E is equal to Mc squared, as our pen-name E equals McC .

"We started batting it around. And Fred's version of this is somewhat different from mine," admits del Rey, "but, since I planned it," he contends, "I think my mind is somewhat clearer on this.

"I suggested McCann as the last name. Well, McCann is a nice-sounding last name and so on. And he settled for that.

"Well, I had the McC , now we gotta get the 'E'. And we batted various names around, 'Harry' and so on and I said 'How about Edsel' and he didn't like it and so he said: 'No, no Edsels.' (There was no Edsel car as I remember at the time, but Edsel Ford was around.) So we settled on 'Edson' and I was happy, I had what I wanted, the formula (mass/energy equivalence relationship)."

chapter in Italy. And so that was that."

Satirical Sacrifice

But why did del Rey and Pohl pick on the insurance industry?

According to Fred Pohl's partner: "Well, it seemed like a logical thing to do for a novelette. He'd been satirizing a number of industries and, at the time, the insurance companies did not seem to be the most major one to write a novel of the future about. I mean, the pollution of America, the trends of government, all those things were much more major. So we picked — he picked the insurance industry as a good one to do a novelette on, that was all."

Another *raison-d'être* for the choice of the insurance industry was the presence of particular elements in it that were ripe for satirical exaggeration.

"Oh, of course, the idea, the whole concept of security: everybody wants security. And I think there's truth in that — people don't want freedom, people don't want independence, they want security."

"And the insurance companies, more and more, are at least claiming to offer security: you're safer in your car if you get in an accident; you're safe crossing the street if you get in an accident; if you have a home, and somebody walks across the lawn, of course they can sue you (that, incidentally, is the real genesis of it all — the lawyer's tendency to sue) and so you have insurance for everything."

"So far, they haven't insured you of an unsuccessful love life but I'm sure they're working on it," he wryly comments.

In this particular novel, the insurance companies were really controlling the world.

"They were running the world," says del Rey, "and if you look at the financial situations of insurance companies you begin to think that maybe they will eventually."

"So, yeah, we started with the idea of the insurance and then there's all the Medicare programs, and the — I don't know what-all there is — the cradle-to-grave insurance stuff."

So Pohl and del Rey wrote an extended satirical take-off on Blue Cross, inventing 'Blue Blanket' and 'Blue Bolt' coverage or policies.

"Oh, yeah, we worked hard on some of those names," he recalls.

So *PREFERRED RISK* was a definitely

satirical extrapolation on insurance in the future.

Blue Sky Speculations

Within the plot of *PREFERRED RISK*, del Rey and Fred Pohl threw in one of science fiction's speculative but still seriously-discussed What if...? concepts: suspended animation.

A number of SF stories have used this over the years, often with a hero who awakens in a future world where he is now rich since money he had invested or banked before being frozen has accumulated enormous interest and value. This might affect the insurance industry a great deal, if the technique (now called cryonics) was fully developed and workable.

"That would be a tremendous thing and I don't know how it would work out. There is this business of freezing people, supposedly after they're dead and reviving them sometime in the future — which I don't believe in! But if they could do that, I'm not sure there is a any way of handling it. You can't do it by the straight piling up of interest because it looks great: if you take 4 percent per year and you keep piling it up forever, or for a hundred years, the man's incredibly rich. But, of course, one of two things happens: either some bad investments somewhere don't work out or inflation builds up to match it."

"And, if you started bringing people back they'd almost certainly go through a re-education period to find any useful work or else they would be on some kind of a dole which the insurance companies would have to handle. I think it would break the insurance companies completely in the long run. I don't think the government, or the economy, or the insurance business, could handle it."

In this post-World War II novel, the insurance companies even had special policies to protect citizens/clients in case they were blown up or in a war skirmish and, perhaps, to also make a profit for themselves out of war?

But del Rey thinks this latter motive is unlikely.

"They could only do that when war was a fairly unlikely event, not on any large scale. At the present time, almost all insurance policies have anti-war clauses in them so that they aren't responsible for what happens in war. I think they have to. There's no way of setting up good actuarial

tables for a war — at least not for a large-scale war.”

Obviously, del Rey’s right, if the whole world gets wiped out, the insurance companies are going to get wiped out, too.

The bureaucratic nature of any firm that’s dealing in statistics and policies and that type of thing is another ripe area for satire, del Rey agrees.

“Yes, and it’s been touched on at times. There’ve been a number of minor satires, minor in the sense that they’re mostly short stories, on the bureaucratic nature of — anything, it isn’t just those actuarial tables. Any company that gets to any size immediately becomes a bureaucracy and any state, any local community, certainly any national government of any size, immediately turns into a bureaucracy.

“We’ve found no other way of handling things and the sins of bureaucracy are very real. The necessity is real but the sins are real.”

Target practice

Does the insurance industry make kind of a sitting-duck target in that sense?

“I suppose any large industry would,” del Rey responds. “I’m sure that if we’d done it 10 years ago about the automobile industry, it would have been a sitting duck target. Of course, it isn’t any more because it’s in such bad shape it’s suffered from it already. If we’d — oh, I don’t know — I don’t think that there’s anything you can’t write a sitting duck out of any large industry. Of course, there remains government itself, the biggest industry of all.”

Is this in effect because the establishment, like insurance companies, seek the status quo? If there’s change, it would affect their profitability and so they tend to go for the constant?

“If so, then they’ve failed,” claims del Rey, “because they found it getting tougher and tougher on them because of all these extra costs. I think that they’ve got a bear by the tail and the government’s got a bear by the tail and they don’t quite know what to do with it. I’m not sure but that the trends that we see now might even defeat what we outlined in *PREFERRED RISK*.”

He refers here to “the extra cost of things that’s making it impossible for the insurance companies to keep up with

rising costs so easily. It keeps them from growing as fast as they would, from having as much influence on the people as it might, because their inner costs go up so radically.”

Fiction or Prediction?

Are there aspects of the insurance industry today about which SF author del Rey feels that their 25-year-old predictions or exaggerated prophecies in *PREFERRED RISK* were accurate and have really come true?

“Well, not exactly,” he admits, “but I would say that some trends might lead that way. There’s the exaggerated cost of hospitalization which I think comes from the fact that you have Blue Cross, Blue Shield, Medicaid, Medicare and the other things. So that a doctor tends to put you in a hospital rather than trying to treat you in any other way. It’s simpler for him, and it’s cheaper for the patient because they’re covered.

“I think many of the difficulties of the medical profession, hospitals and so on have arisen out of this wide coverage, he concludes.

In many ways, it surprises Lester del Rey that his collaborative novel, *PREFERRED RISK*, stands up after twenty-odd years.

He asks himself: “Does it? I don’t know whether it does or not. My wife’s assistant read it and he said it did. I hope it does but I’m not objective, the way we wrote it and everything else makes me incapable of judging it.

“If it does stand up, well, human nature doesn’t change that much, human society doesn’t change so much. And, while we may have exaggerated we were still exaggerating human society,” concludes SF author Lester del Rey.

And that is what science fiction writers do so well. They make tomorrow believable, with a lived-in feeling and personally-relevant segments of society; they pose and dramatize What if...? premises or they poke fun at the future.

Using these specialized literary techniques, they make significant comments on the human condition. So that, at the same time as they entertain, they also give readers something substantial to think about: possible shapes for our common future. ●

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Lisa Tuttle &
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